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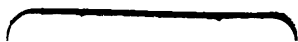
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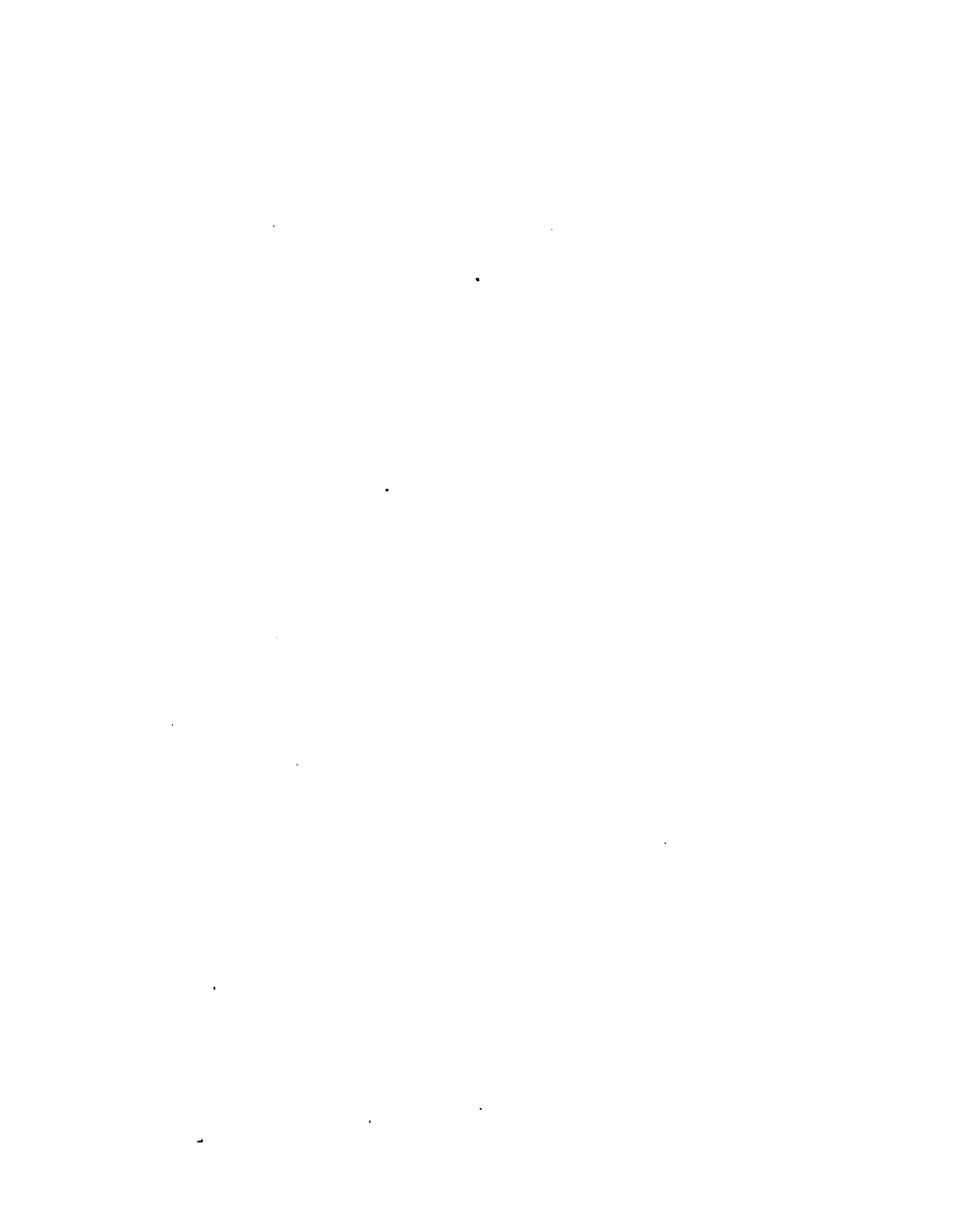


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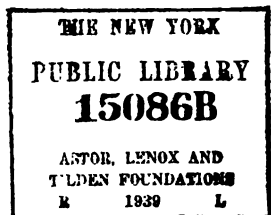
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FIAMMETTA.

CHAPTER I.

THE last days of June had come and gone in Rome, and July, still, hot, and breathless, spread its cloudless sky over the city. In the villas and under the dark-green ilexes nightingales were still pouring forth their songs of woe ; larks, far up in the sky, drowned in its light, filled the air of the Campagna with a continuous ripple of far fine warblings. The silent stone-pines poised their spreading green canopies in the hot sunshine, and cast their shadow on the burnt grass. Flocks of goats crept under the shade of the lush hedges, or the lower hollows. The great gray oxen, tormented by flies, plunged into the watercourses and lashed their sides in vain to drive away those pertinacious pests. A continuous hum of insects filled the air ; bees were busy in the flowers ; ants pursuing their strange voyages everywhere along the

earth ; butterflies floating aimlessly about, as idle as the ants were busy. A delicate purple veil shrouded the distant mountains — where here and there gleamed a village or town along their slopes. The last edge of snow had vanished from the highest peak of the Leonessa, and surrendered to the piercing arrows of the sun. The grain was ripe and yellow in the plains, and scarcely waved its heavy head in the still air. The gorgeous poppies were drooping amid the corn. The locusts which shrilled and sawed all the long morning and seemed to heat the air, paused and took their siesta after noon ; and they and the *grilli* again took up their strain when evening came on. Summer had come. Pan was sleeping at high noon, and a mystery of silent sunshine was over all.

In the city, the sun flashed back from houses and pavements with a blinding glare. Shops were closed at mid-day, blinds were shut, curtains drawn, work stopped — the world of Rome took its siesta. The streets were comparatively empty, and the few who were abroad sought the narrow strips of shade, and crept slowly along close to the walls. Workmen abandoned their toil, and, stretched in the shadow and along the church

steps, slept prone upon the stones. Nothing was cool save the fountains, that flashed as they flung up their glittering columns in the sun, broke into pearl-showers of spray, or welled with a hollow gurgle into the broken and mossy marble troughs of many a shadowy courtyard.

As the afternoon came on, the world again awoke ; shutters and blinds were opened, and the streets began to fill with a sauntering crowd. As the sun sloped down to the west, and twilight drew near, life revived, crowds thronged into the piazzi, and sat under the awnings of the restaurants and took their ices and coffee. Carriages rolled through the streets towards the Villa Borghese ; and there was a steady stream on foot going forth to breathe the cooler air, to lie on the grass under the shadows, and to saunter along its green alleys. Newsboys screamed their evening papers through the streets. *Limonari* were busy again in the kiosks. *Contadini* and workmen rolled their *boccie* along the narrow roads outside the walls of the city ; or, returning from their work, shouted their songs, that came softened by distance to the ear. In the *osterias* on the Campagna, groups were gathered in the open air, laugh-

ing and talking, and strolling home as the sun dropped below the horizon. In the city, all the thronging world drew a long sigh of relief, as the shadows of twilight grew longer, and the sharp sun pierced no longer into the narrow streets.

It was towards the close of a hot summer's day, in the early part of July, that Marco Stenoni was still working in his studio. His model, a tall dark girl from the Abruzzi, was standing on a platform before him, draped in oriental robes and shawls, with a tall sword in her hand, and a weary look in her eyes; while he was nervously busy in transferring her to a large canvas, representing Judith after the slaying of Holofernes. The picture was nearly completed to all appearances; but it was evident from the excited movements of the artist, as he brushed away his hair, moved back hurriedly from the canvas, stared alternately at the portrait and the model, then rushed up to the picture and added a stroke to it, and muttered to himself, that he was not satisfied. Neither spoke. He was too busy, in his mind as well as with his hand. She was totally uninterested in his hero and tired, and was wishing for the sitting to close. A quarter of an hour passed

thus. Then Marco, after looking at the picture attentively for a minute's space, laid down his palette suddenly, and said "*Basta*. That will do. I cannot see any more. Take off these things and dress yourself. The light is gone, and I am tired."

So saying, he sank down into a large arm-chair ; stretched his arms at full length over his head, yawned, exclaimed, "Bah ! how hot it is ;" and then gave himself up to silent thought.

The model retired behind the screen to change her dress.

For a few minutes there was silence. At last she said, "When shall I come again, *signore* ? To-morrow ?"

"No," he answered ; "I have no need of you for the present. I shall let the picture alone now. It is getting too hot to work here in Rome, and I am going away."

"Going away !" she said with surprise. "I am sorry."

"Why are you sorry ?"

"Because then I must go too. Everybody is going away — or rather, everybody is gone but you — and I shall have no more work."

"And where shall you go ?"

Back to my people in the Abruzzi, for the summer."

"And what will you do there?"

"Work! *signore*. Work in the fields and in the sun. It will be hard work, too. We poor people cannot do as you do, and go to travel and to be idle all summer long. How I should like to travel!"

"Oh, I am not going to travel. I am going back into the country, just as you are, and to my people; or rather, to where my people, as you call them, used to be, for unfortunately I have not any people. I am the last of my tribe."

"I wish you would take me with you."

"I think so, indeed. What could I do with you?"

"Oh, I would work for you, and do anything you want."

"Ah, well, Nanna; but that's impossible, you know."

"I suppose so — of course — naturally. You'll be back in the autumn, I hope?"

"I hope so."

"If I can serve you then as model, I hope you won't forget me. I shall be back by October."

"I won't forget you, Nanna."

"*A rivederla*, then, *signore* ; a pleasant summer to you, and a good turn at the lottery."

"And *figli maschi*, I suppose."

She laughed ; said "Of course," then shook hands with him and went out.

He sat still and mused. The twilight was growing grayer and grayer, but there was still a fair light in the studio. It was a picturesque room, — the walls fantastically hung with pieces of old brocade, some utterly faded, some merely toned down by age, of various hues and patterns and sizes ; old vases, majolica jars, and plates stood here and there on the tables or affixed to the walls ; an antique Venetian lantern of worked brass hung from the ceiling ; prints, photographs, engravings, and sketches in color were scattered everywhere about. Two large divans, covered with faded stuffs, were on either side, with large cushions ; and a number of odd chairs of various patterns and ages stood here and there, reckless of order. In fact, there was no order anywhere, and it was this very absence of stiff order which lent the charm to the room. Everything was accidental and scattered about, as it happened to fall, without dis-

tinct purpose and arrangement. Still it was all harmonious and picturesque, and the fading light and deepening shadows made it seem even more so ; and lent it a certain peace and quiet which soothed the senses.

For a good quarter of an hour Marco sat and mused, half-definitely, half-indefinitely dreaming. While he dreams, we will give a glance at his life and history, and sketch his portrait.

He was a handsome young man of twenty-five years of age, rather above the middle size, firmly built but slender in his proportions. His forehead was high and full, with lifted eyebrows, his nose slightly aquiline, his mouth full and large, his eyes a reddish-brown, and his hair, which thickly curled over his head, blond and inclined to red, his skin fair and thin, with a good deal of color, his temperament nervous, excitable, and impatient. He was, as he had said to Nanna, the last of his tribe — an orphan with neither brothers or sisters — of a decayed family of Counts, who little by little had squandered their patrimony, and fallen into poverty. His mother had died when he was young. His two sisters, both older than he, having no dowry or means of support, save what

their father could give them for their daily needs while under his roof, found no pretenders to their hands, and at last, disappointed and disgusted with the dull life they were living, betook themselves to the usual resource of girls in a similar situation in Italy — the convent — where they became nuns, and after pining away in utter inanity for a few years in a cloister, died like birds in a cage. The elder brother, after making ducks and drakes of the small sum he had inherited from his mother and of the allowance given him by his father, joined the volunteers under Garibaldi, and perished in battle. Marco was thus left alone with his father. They lived together, until he had attained the age of fifteen, in a villa in the Apennines, the last remains of the fortune of the family — a dull, sad, eventless life, with no companions or friends save the farmers and *fattori* of the neighborhood and their children, and with restricted means. His father, who was proud and somewhat stern of nature, fretted constantly against the restrictions of his life and the meanness of his fortune, and sought with what little money he could raise to enlarge his means by speculation. But all his projects turned out ill, and each left him

poorer than before. He had faith, however, that his son, somehow or other, would retrieve the fortune of the family. He was a bright-spirited boy, full of ambition and hopes; but during his early years he had been without associates of his own class, and had for the most part lived with persons beneath his position, and though his father had given him a fair education, his tastes and character were without much development. It happened, however, that by accident Carlo Franzini, an artist of some celebrity, strayed into the neighborhood one summer to make some sketches of scenery, and with him Marco made an acquaintance which soon ripened into one of those enthusiastic friendships which are formed only in youth. He followed his new friend everywhere, when he shot, when he fished, when he strolled, when he painted; and a strong desire came over him to be an artist himself. His friend, who liked his company, and was pleased with his enthusiasm and an admiration which was given without stint, put a pencil and brushes in his hand, and gave him his first lessons in painting. He soon developed a decided talent for art, and after the summer was past and Carlo was about to take leave

of the country and return to Rome, he proposed to Marco's father to take charge of him, carry him to Rome, and educate him as a painter. The old count was delighted to accept this offer; and so it was arranged that Marco should accompany his friend. The only question was one of money, but this was soon settled. Little was needed. Marco promised to restrict his expenditure within the smallest limits. The old count squeezed out of his purse all that he could command, and Marco set forth delighted.

Rome was to him a new world of experiences and delights. There were seductions on every side, to idleness, to extravagance, and to vice, as well as to art. But the resolution of Marco was strong. He lived sparsely and worked hard, and soon began to attract attention among the artists, and to do fair work. His ambition was great, his talent decided. Little by little he found purchasers of his sketches and pictures, and began to make a name for himself, and after a few years he earned enough by his profession to support himself without assistance from his father. At first he had restricted himself almost solely to his studio and to his artist friends; but as his prospects grew better,

he went more into society, though it seemed to exercise little influence on his life and thoughts. Essentially a dreamer and of a poetic temperament, he found little pleasure in the scandal and personal talk which was the current coin of the society he frequented, and his main delight was his studio.

Two years previous to the time when we now find him, he suddenly received a letter announcing the grave illness of his father, and requesting his immediate presence if he wished to see him again alive. He instantly hurried back to the old villa, and arrived there but a few hours before the old man's death. The count stretched out his hand to him feebly as he entered the room, smiled, and said, "I was afraid I should not see you again, Marco. But I am glad to see you. I thank you for coming."

His son bent over him, kissed him, and took his hand. His father pressed it feebly, and after a moment's silence said —

"I am going — very fast — and it will soon be over, and I am not sorry. I have made a poor hand of it in this great game of life, and I shall be glad to throw up my cards."

Here his son interfered, and began to say

some consoling words, but his father stopped him —

“Don’t interrupt me. Listen to me. I have very little breath. Let me say what I have got to say while I can. I have done ill with my life; don’t follow my example. I am afraid I shall leave you almost nothing. My debts, my debts — how they have tormented me! How they still continue to torment me! But you will pay them off — as you can — if you can. I have hopes, great hopes, of you. You must raise the fallen fortunes of the family. You must, you will do better than I. Don’t speculate — don’t play — don’t waste your life as I have mine. God bless you. You have been a good boy — a good son.”

Here he fell back exhausted, while Marco, with his eyes full of tears, gazed at him, and said some words of encouragement, and hoped he would still get well, and that he must not give up life. But the old man scarcely seemed to hear him. He was wandering away in mind, and struggling with a thought which worried and tormented him.

“It is sadly encumbered, the old place,” he murmured. “How shall I pay it off? There will be almost nothing left. Those debts!”

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Then he roused again.

"I trust you, Marco. I believe in you. Good boy — good-by — pray for me."

Then he dropped away, and seemed to lose all sense of outward things, and after an hour passed silently out of this world. —

After the funeral, when Marco began to look carefully into the condition of the property, he found that his father's previsions proved only too true. The estate was deeply mortgaged; there was almost nothing to pay the present debts. Creditors were imperious; and there was nothing to be done but to sell out nearly everything. The house itself, however, with a couple of farms, he was able to reserve, on assurance that he would pay the interest on the mortgage; and this, hard as it pressed upon him, he did. He could not bear to give up the old villa where his youth had been spent. "I will keep this, at least," he said; "and perhaps — perhaps — if all goes well, some time I may be able to buy back the rest."

So, having settled this point, and retained the old steward and stewardess to look after the farms and house in his absence, he returned to Rome and to his work in the studio.

After this his prospects began to grow

brighter and brighter. His pictures sold well and at good prices; and he steadily laid by all he could spare to carry out his project of redeeming the old place.

Two years had thus gone by, when we find him at the close of a hot day in July — the work of the day done — dreaming wide awake in his chair.

From his musings he was aroused by a knock at the door. "Come in!" he cried, and the door was opened by his friend Carlo.

"Ah!" said Carlo, "I am glad to find you in. It is so late, that I was afraid you would have gone."

"Yes, it is late," said Marco. "But I am tired of work, and was sitting here dreaming. Take a seat. I am glad you have come in, for I was going to see you, as soon as I had cleaned my palette and brushes, to say good-by."

"Good-by! Are you going away?"

"Yes; I am tired of my work. It does not satisfy me, and it is growing too hot here. I am off to-morrow for the summer."

"Where are you going?"

"Up to the villa. The fact is, I ought to go there. I have not been there, you know, since my father died, and the eye of the

master, you know, etc. ; and besides, I have not had a holiday for so long, and I need it. It will give me new life. I want to breathe the country air again, and to lie under the trees. This hot, stifling breath of the city enervates me : all my faculties seem to stagnate here. I should like to feel the rough grasp of a peasant's hand, to hear the hearty old greetings of the country folks, to swing an axe, to delve in the soil, to wander through the lonely woods, to stretch myself on the breast of dear Mother Earth, as I used to do in the good old days of boyhood. Ah, yes ! all the days of boyhood are good old days : we forget the troubles, and only remember the pleasures. I want to get nearer to nature — to be blown upon by the free air ; to be drenched by the pouring rain ; to clamber over the mountains ; to hear the wild torrents dash from their boulders ; to listen to the bleat of sheep, the low of cows, the cheering clarion of cocks — in fact, to be at home again. Home ! yes, for home is always where we grew up as boys. Here I am, sick at heart, sick of eternal trouble and scandal, and sick of jealousies that gnaw the green out of life's leaves : sick of art and models, and pictures and cities. I

need a new bath in nature. I am getting into a rut: nothing answers my wishes even in art. Look at that picture that I am now painting — I hate it! I am sick of Judith and Holofernes, and the whole lot of them! Something is evidently the matter with me, for nothing answers — nothing goes right.”

“Ah! yes,” answered Carlo; “you have overworked yourself, and it is time for you to have some change. You are right: go into the country — it will revive you. I wish I could go with you.”

“Do, do! ah, that would be delightful! Come with me. I can give you a room — aye, as many rooms as you like — and the freedom of the place, and rough country fare. Come, and we will revive the old days and be boys again.”

“Impossible — at least for the present. Later, if you are still there, I will try to find you. But now it is simply impossible.”

“Well, only promise me that you will come. You will find me there all summer, and I shall always give you the warmest welcome. I never forget what I owe you. You made me and saved me.”

“Nonsense! You made and saved yourself.”

"Well, we won't banter words. What is—is, and nothing will alter it. If I had never had the luck to know you, I should probably have stayed where I was, and rotted my life away to no purpose. You know that as well as I. You need not shake your head. But I'll say no more about it. To change the subject, what do you think of my Judith? Tell me frankly—I hate it."

"That is going too far. You are tired of it, that's all. That is a mood which comes over every artist at certain times; all his work looks wretched to him, however good it be."

"But speak frankly. You know how I value your opinion. Is it worth anything or not?"

"Of course it is. It is very clever."

"Clever! I hate the word clever. That means that it has no soul in it."

"No! I do not mean that exactly. If you ask my honest opinion—and of course you do—I will tell you what I think. The work is clever—in parts, very clever—perhaps too clever. It has spirit, vigor of touch, and excellent brush-work. That mantle, for instance, is admirable; that fringe

masterly. One sees at once that you know your *technique* — that you know how to paint. The background is excellent, and the figure comes well off from it. But ” —

Here Carlo paused and hesitated.

“ But — oh, yes ; but — I know what that means — *but* it has no soul in it. I told you that was what you meant when you said it was clever. Out with it ! ”

“ Perhaps it is — that is, with certain qualifications. What I was going to say, however, was that, well as you have rendered your subject, despite the skill and knowledge you have displayed in the treatment, it does not, in my opinion, as a subject, suit your peculiar genius. Your heart was not really in it. Your path lies in a different direction, and one must do what his own nature prescribes really to succeed. It is useless to kick against the pricks : each must follow the bent of his own genius. Yours does not lie in the direction of the cruel, the violent, the stern ; but rather in the poetic, the ideal. Even the fantastic suits you better than the intense ; grace is your gift more than power ; why not follow the natural lead of your imagination, rather than force it into artificial paths ? Those of your pictures which have

pleased me the most — some of them have pleased me greatly — are in the vein of sentiment, of romance, of refinement. The heroic is another sort of thing, alien to your powers. Now, Judith is nothing unless she is heroic, stern, powerful. Why did you seek such a subject? In the first place, it is utterly worn out; galleries everywhere are peopled with Judiths — all black-haired, all with a great sword, all after a certain prescribed pattern. For my part, I think her a detestable creature, and I have had enough of her; but *that* is neither here nor there. If I could even see any one picture of real power and originality of conception, I could admire it despite of it being Judith; but I never do see one, nor do I ever see a David that is not an ugly little *gamin*, with the head of an ogre at his side to represent Goliath. Last year's exhibition was full of them. I am, therefore, I suppose, not a fair judge of such pictures; I am prejudiced against them at the very outset. Why did you select Judith?"

"I don't know. I suppose for variety. I got tired of myself, and weary with doing the same sort of thing over and over again. But what you say is true — I acknowledge it. I have never had any heart in this picture, and

now I hate it! It drives me away from Rome. I've a great mind to destroy it."

"No, no! That is going too far the other way. Many, I dare say, will admire it. It will appeal to their minds; but I confess, to speak frankly, I do not care for it, despite its talent and its good work. *Technique* is admirable as a means, abominable as an end; and nowadays art seems to me to be running solely into mere *technique* — the hand is of more value than the head. But you have real imagination, and I shall be sorry to see you following the lead of certain artists of our day, whose only desire seems to be to startle and surprise, even by the sacrifice of all beauty; and who go so far as to preach loudly the gospel of the ugly and the common, and to cry out wildly that, as nature is ugly — often very ugly — so art should be; that perfection exists nowhere, and ought not to be sought for; that the real is never ideal; and that what art has to do is to copy nature just as it happens to be, even though ugly and deformed. My notion is absolutely the contrary. Art, in my opinion, is no slave to nature, and no art is worth anything except in so far as it is ideal — that is, that it uses nature as a language and

means to express an idea — a conception — a creation of the imagination. But I will not preach any more.”

“Oh, preach on! preach on! I like to hear you.”

“No! I will preach no more; but I will give you an instance, a personal instance, of what I think of your powers. Your Judith has many fine qualities as work, but it has no originality of conception, and it is not in your way. Now I do remember a sketch you once showed me that struck me as thoroughly adapted to your genius, and which I thought eminently original and full of charm. It represented a naiad seated on a mossy boulder, one foot dropped into a clear, brown, pebbly pool, which caught the reflections of the overhanging trees. She was utterly alone — utterly unconscious. The torrent which fed this pool sang as it foamed and sparkled over the rocks. There was a whisper of trees, through which the sun glinted far up the distance; and yet silence brooded over the whole place, and serenity filled the air, and there was a feeling of the antique in the simplicity, the self-surrender, the absolute unconsciousness of any beholder, which charmed me. There was a thought, a feel-

ing, a conception in this sketch which touched me like a poem. It was a little poem in fact. It was quite outside of our workaday world. It was not mere talk and twaddle, as many of our pictures are, but language in verse and rhythm — in a word, an idyl of nature. You will say the subject is not much of a subject. But it is not the subject; it is the mode in which it is rendered which makes it prosaic or poetic. It is not that a thought is grammatically expressed that makes it a poem, and it is not literal imitation of nature that makes a work of art enchanting. Yes; enchanting is the word. Artists must enchant as poets do; and nature is never good in art until it is enchanted by the soul of the artist."

"Oh! you overestimate that little sketch. It is really nothing of itself. You have added, by your gracious interpretation, all the poetry."

"Have I said anything you did not feel when you made it?"

"No; I admit that was what I sought to say. But what I had to say and what I felt was too fine to express, and I did not express it."

"Where is the sketch? Let me see it again."

Marco went to the side of the studio, pulled out a page portfolio, and turned over its leaves for a few moments. At last he said, "Ah, yes, here it is at last! I am not a little ashamed to show it to you after all your panegyric."

"Let me see it."

And Marco gave it to him. Carlo took it, looked at it carefully for some minutes without saying a word.

"Well," said Marco, "what do you think now?"

"Of course it is a sketch; but it has the element of all I said I saw in it. The question is, can you ever carry out that sketch without losing its soul? Can you keep that feeling of innocence, privacy, serenity that is here simply indicated, when you elaborate it into a picture? It is now a suggestion full of delicacy and refinement; but can you preserve this light volatile spirit, and make your Ariel do the magician's work? If you can, you will make a charming picture. But where will you find your naiad? They have abandoned our streams, and in their stead sits a vulgar factory girl, and counts her wages. If you can find the naiad, all well; but if you paint the factory girl, good-

by to all the sentiment which charms in this sketch."

"And you really advise me to paint this?"

"I do; and let it be your summer's work. You are going into the country, among the wild forests and glens of the Apennines, and perhaps you may find there your inspiration as well as your facts; only don't let the facts smother the inspiration. If you take my advice, you will paint this picture this summer. You have nature to choose from, and good luck be with you."

"I will do so. At all events, I will take the sketch with me, and see what I can do."

"And when do you go?"

"To-morrow, by the half-past ten train."

"Half-past ten. I will be there then, and see you off. I will leave you now, for you must have a good deal to do in putting your things together."

So saying, Carlo left his friend to huddle together, after the fashion of man, the things he intended to take, and to crowd them into his portmanteau in a way that would have made a woman weep. Boots and shirts and portfolios, and coats and boxes and bottles, were crammed pell-mell

in, to fight it out as they could with each other ; and Marco was well pleased at last, when, after sitting on the portmanteau, and crowding the hasp of the lock into its place, he succeeded in turning the key, and stood up flushed and panting with his exertions.

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning, true to his word, Carlo was at the train. There is nothing more boring both to the traveller and his friends than this meeting to say "Good-by" at a train. Conversation is impossible. The traveller's mind is occupied with his luggage, in getting his seat and settling himself, and thinking whether he has left this or that thing behind; and when this is all arranged, his thoughts are still astray and disorganized. He shakes hands and talks spasmodically, and suddenly recollects something, and feels after his pocket-book to see that that is all right, and sends messages to his friends which will never be delivered; and his friends wish him a good journey and a pleasant summer over and over again, and try to think of something to say, and smile and stand about, and ask idle questions, and tell him the day is charming, and hope he will not find it too hot or too cold, and wish they were going with him, and say they suppose

he will return at such or such a time, and if he sees Blank, to tell him or her they are well, and send him or her greetings ; and finally, to the satisfaction of all, the bell rings, and the guards begin to shut the doors ; and then he shakes hands again and says Good-by, and mounts into the carriage and again looks up at the rack and counts his luggage, and feels in his pocket to see if his tickets are there and his luggage receipt, and finding them all right, he leans on both elbows out of the window, to the annoyance of the other passengers within ; and all the company look at their watches or at the great clock in the station, and the engine begins to puff, and makes a feint of starting and then stops ; and all are interested in a late traveller, who, hot and perspiring and out of breath, is hurried along the platform and shuffled into a place, glad to find anything to occupy their attention ; and when he is fairly in, and the bell rings, and the train begins to move, all cry out again Good-by, for the twentieth time, and wave their handkerchiefs or lift their hats and smile, and watch the train as it clatters out of the station, and then, with a long sigh of relief that it is over, turn away, and go home.

The last words that Carlo said were, "Good luck to you ! and I hope you 'll find your naiad. Let me know if you do."

It was with a sense of satisfaction, as if he had thrown off a weight from his shoulders, that Marco leaned back at last in his seat when the agitations of getting off were over, and saw the Campagna slip by him. The day was delightful, a light breeze fanned through the carriage, and he had the boon of silence ; all his work was behind him, and he was glad to be away from it. His fellow-travellers were strangers, and he could give himself up to his own thoughts and reflections, and gaze undisturbed at the scene that rolled out before him with ever-varying lights and shadows, — the mountains veiled in violet mists ; the many fields of ripening grain ; the gleaming watercourses ; the *contadini* toiling in the sun ; the groups of reapers that stopped from their work to gaze at the passing train ; the great gray oxen, wandering here and there in herds, or gathered in groups in the shadow of some tall tree, or along the green clumps and thickets overhanging some stream or pool ; the broad fields, painted with masses of scarlet poppies and snowy daisies, golden buttercups, dande-

lions, mustard, and a myriad wild flowers. The air was scented with the odors of new-mown hay; larks were raining a mist of songs from the blue heights of the sky; and all these sights and sounds and odors lulled his senses, and passed like a vision before him. He had nothing to do but to drink in this beauty, as the meadows drank in the sunshine.

And so the hours slipped away, with perpetual beauty, perpetual change, the dream interrupted now and then by the nightmare of some hideous station, with its dreary prose, its grimy walls, its foul odors of smoke and oil, its noise, cattle, confusion, and vulgarity.

It was towards evening that he arrived at the station where he was to stop. As usual, there was assembled on the platform a little group of ladies and gentlemen who had villas in the vicinity, and to whom, in the dull routine of their aimless life, the evening arrival of the train from Rome was an event of interest. Who knows what friend they might catch a glimpse of in passing, and shake hands with, and ask the news of the city, for which they pined while they were away? For it is only the exceptional Italian who looks at his country life in any

other light than that of exile, and who does not long to be back again in the crowded city, and to sit in the *cafés* and watch the life in the *piazzi*, and wander on the public promenades and listen to the bands, and talk gossip. Among them, however, Marco found no acquaintances, and was well pleased to find none. As he hurriedly got out his luggage and stepped on the platform, however, he caught the well-known face of Pasquale, the *vetturino*, who had so often driven him over the mountains when he was a boy. Pasquale's red face lighted up with a smile as he recognized him, and coming forward and taking off his hat, he cried, —

“But how is this? You here, Signor Conte! and how are you? Well, I hope; and what can I do for you?”

“All right,” answered Marco; “and you — the same, I hope.”

“All well, and a thousand thanks, except Maria. You know the little Maria? she has taken some medicine to-day; a little disturbance, not serious. She will be all right to-morrow.”

When an Englishman says, “How do you do?” his friend replies, “How do you do?” and neither answers the question. But an

Italian invariably gives you a complete account of himself, stating all the particulars of his health if he is not quite well, and what he has done for himself, and what medicines he has taken, and he expects you to do the same. It is not with them a mere formality of salutation.

"But," continued Pasquale, after these preliminaries were settled, "where is your luggage? What can I do for you?"

"You are just the man I want," said Marco. "I am going up to the old place to spend a month or two, and I want a good little *bagasino* — one horse, you know — to carry me there — one horse will do."

"I've exactly the thing for you, if you have not much luggage."

"Oh no, a couple of valises, and a portfolio and paint-box. There they are."

"Ah! I think we can manage those."

"Well, stir about! I'm in a hurry; and it will take us two good hours to get there at least, if your horse is good."

"The best little horse in the place, no matter what the other is. And here he is just outside."

So that was all settled. The *bagasino* was a little one-seated trap, with a rope-net-

ted bottom and two wheels, such as is used to go over the mountains, and the horse was one of those sturdy Tuscan ponies that will stand any amount of work, and are not wanting either in speed.

In a few moments the luggage was in ; the beggars who thronged about them ceased their litany of whining when Marco tossed among them a few *soldi*, for which they scrambled and fought ; and off went the pony at a good round pace, Pasquale making the streets of the little village echo to the continuous crack of his whip, saluting the villagers that nodded to him on either side as he passed, his little Pomeranian dog barking like mad at everybody and everything, as he whirled about on the back of the vehicle right and left, the wheels rattling over the pavement with a grinding din, and the bells on the pony's neck ringing merrily. Once off the pavement and out of the town, the *bagasino* rolled easily along to the chime of the bells, and the din was over.

"A capital little pony this of yours," said Marco.

This simple remark was a key which opened endless rooms, suite after suite, of

horse-talk, — the age of the pony, where he was found, how he was bargained for, how Pasquale had been offered double his price for him, how he would not part from him for the best pair of horses in town, how little he ate, how many miles he could go, how capital he was as a saddle-horse, — and then followed long stories about his feats, and about other horses, that lasted an hour at least ; and Pasquale had not even then told the half he had to tell.

Meanwhile the sun was westering, the shadows were sloping low, the sunset clouds grew rosy in the west, the cool breeze began to come damply up the valleys, the cows were wandering home, the sheep were following the shepherd to their fold, and gradually a gray veil spread over the whole earth. The road, which for some miles had been nearly level, now began to rise and grow steeper and steeper ; sometimes clinging along the side of a precipitous slope, sometimes traversing a bridge under which a torrent flowed weakly, that in winter was a furious river, sometimes again descending for a space, only to clamber up again. Little by little the vineyards with their rich and drooping festoons ceased ; and the smoky

olives laid out in regular rows were no longer seen, save as one looked down on to the valley. And in their stead rose groves of chestnuts and firs. Here and there was a gray old farmhouse or villa, or ruin of an old castle; and at long intervals a grimy dilapidated town. The air was every moment growing cooler as they ascended, and night came on. Against the still light sky great shadowy mountains turned their dark sides, silent and vague and mysterious. As the light faded out of the west, a silvery splendor was seen in the east; and the full moon rose and brimmed the valleys with its dim and ghostly pallor, and a silence came over all nature, broken only by fitful gushes of the nightingales, the long hoot of an owl, the tinkle of the bells on the pony, and the continuous whisper of the *grilli* on the grass. Conversation had long ceased. It seemed to Marco an impertinence to talk in such a presence; and even Pasquale seemed to feel its influence, or, at all events, to perceive that his companion desired silence, and he interrupted it only now and then with a chirrup to the pony.

Marco, as they went along, was dreaming of many things and of nothing; a confused

stream of reminiscences, feelings, hopes, sorrows, swept through his mind, without order or consequence. He was weary with the heat and with the journey, and now and then drowsed away into a half sleep, from which he was constantly aroused by some sharp jerk of the *bagasino*.

At last, after a three hours' pull up the hills, and when he had for the twentieth time fallen into a drowse, he was startled by the sharp crack of Pasquale's whip, rattling out on the air with a volley right and left like pistol-shots, and waking he looked about him.

"Ah!" he cried; "here we are at last."

"Yes, Signor Conte, here we are; and we have done it in good time, too."

So saying, he poured forth another volley of cracks, and whistled shrilly. His whistle was returned, and a light gleamed in the villa toward which they were approaching through an avenue of cypresses.

In a few minutes the *bagasino* stopped before the door, which was opened by the *fattore*, Pietro, and his wife, who held out a lantern to light them, and greeted them with loud cries of welcome. "*Benvenuto! benvenuto! Signor Conte.*"

"Thank you ; thank you. You are both well, I hope. Ah ! I see you are ; and you received my letter."

"Yes, signor ; we are all well. Thanks to the Madonna, all well ; and we received your letter, and we have prepared the rooms you wished — the old rooms, you know, to the west that you wished to occupy ; and we have arranged a supper for you as well as we could, at such a short notice ; for I half suppose you will have a good appetite after your long journey ; and there is a good flask of wine, you may exist on that at least, if the rest does not suit you ; and there is a *frittata* of eggs, and a *bistecca* of *vitella*, and some potatoes, and some cheese ; and I am afraid that is all."

"Thanks, quite enough, and to spare ; though I own I am hungry. So this is the old house ; just the same as it was, though I see you have turned the hall into a hay-loft ; but it smells sweet."

"We will have it cleared out to-morrow, signor ; only we had not time to-day. But truly, truly, I am glad to see you, signor, again. *Benvenuto ! benvenuto !* Ah yes, we have n't seen you since the count, your father, of blessed memory, died. Ah, me !

Two years ago ; two years ago ; and you are looking well and strong ; and you will be glad to see the old house again ; and I and Maria are right glad too to see you. Eh, Maria ? ”

“ Blessed be the Madonna and all the saints ! that we are,” said Maria, and nodded and curtsied and smiled.

“ And now, Maria,” cried the old *fattore* ; “ *via*, quick into the kitchen and get ready the supper, and I will light the signor up to his room. He will want to wash off the dust, I suppose ; and I will take up this valise, and you, Pasquale, bear a hand with the other, and look out, signor, for the step. Ah ! you remember it, I see. It ’s the old room to the west that you wished. Bravo ! bravo ! This is as good as a *terno* at the lottery. Everybody about here will say the same. Eh, Pasquale ? And about the pony, Signor Conte ? ”

“ Put him into the stable, Pasquale,” cried Marco ; “ and give him a good feed, for he has served us well.”

“ I told you, sir, he was a pony worth his weight in gold. You won’t find such another pony hereabouts.”

“ Aye, very true, very true,” interrupted

Marco, for he had heard enough about the pony's value ; "and for Pasquale himself, we must give him a room for the night, and a good feed too. He must be our guest for to-night."

"Thanks," said Pasquale ; "I shall not object to that for a few hours. The pony must have a rest, and I can lie down anywhere ; don't trouble yourself, signor, about me. It will only be for a few hours. Before daybreak I must be off and down to N——, for I have an engagement there. Any other commands, Signor Conte ?"

"Nothing ; thanks. But I have n't paid you yet."

"Oh, no matter for that ; any time will do. No, no, signor."

"Oh yes, yes. No time is so good as the present. And there it is. Is that right ?"

"Perfectly ; but it was not necessary, signor. And now, if you have no other commands, I will go and look after the pony."

"And Pietro will look after you. So good-night, and a good sleep."

"The same again to you, signor, and thanks."

And Pasquale left them. And this was Marco's welcome home. There was a heart-

iness and good-nature in it that warmed him to the heart, and he felt that he had acted wisely in returning. When Pietro and Pasquale had gone out, he gazed about the room, where was all the old furniture he had known as a boy, and then looked out of the window and swept his eye over the landscape and the garden below, that once was so familiar, and then drew a long breath and said to himself, "I am glad that I came."

CHAPTER III.

REFRESHED by a long night's sleep, he awoke the next morning in good spirits, and went out before breakfast to take a look about the place and see if there were any changes. Pietro offered to accompany him, but he chose to go alone. We will, however, go with him unperceived, though we shall not see, perhaps, with his eyes.

The house itself was a rectangular villa, three stories high, built some three centuries ago, with a broad platform in front, in the centre of which was an old stone fountain, now considerably dilapidated and covered with moss, but from whose pipes still issued a weak stream of water that filled its shell-like basin and dropped and oozed through many a crack into the round enclosure below, whose surface was paved with broad green leaves, under which a family of frogs had made their home, and creeping out over the rim chanted at nightfall their low guttural chorus. The platform was bounded by a

wall, with stone posts at intervals, on which still stood three or four old broken and rotting busts, each wanting its nose, and all of them with broken necks, clamped with rusty braces. But ivy had hung its dark-green draperies about them to cover their deformity, and the wild rose and honeysuckle clambered over them now and filled the air at twilight with fragrance. Beyond this platform opened a magnificent view over a vast valley below, sprinkled here and there with villas and farmhouses and little gray villages, that in the distance looked more like rocky outcrops from the hillsides and eminences to which they clung than habitations built by the hands of man. Through the lowest plain a sinuous river curved and gleamed in the sun, like a silver ribbon dropped carelessly upon its bosom. The whole valley, with its varied outlines and prominences, viewed from above seemed like a rolling sea of waves that had been suddenly struck into silence by some tremendous fiat, and now stood calm and motionless and serene, all their agitations over, in a dream of delicate mist. As Marco leaned on the parapet and looked out over it, bathed in the fresh morning light, he thought he had never seen a more

exquisite panorama. Here and there faint blue lines of smoke rose and wavered in the air and melted away in the light from some house or village. From the convent perched upon a breezy cliff rang the far sound of bells. The voices of peasants, calling to each other or singing wild snatches of song, came up softened by distance. Nightingales were pouring forth their love trills. Chaffinches were warbling their fainter strains. The cuckoo was reiterating his call that summer was come, and a myriad of birds were chanting their matin songs.

On either side of the house slopes of forest rose, stretching up the mountain sides as far as the eye could reach, here clothed with dark-haired firs, there green with beeches, or whitened with chestnuts, that were now covered with drooping clusters of pale, juicy blossoms; and behind rose a bare hill, shaven of all its taller growth of trees, but robed by broad glowing masses of golden gorse, that were now in the full splendor of their bloom, and glorified its nakedness. Through these mountains were cloven here and there precipitous defiles, where dark shadows made their lair, while steep cliffs and escarpments of rock, rising almost per-

pendicularly, frowned over them. The whole scenery on this side was wild and serious and solitary, untrained by the hand of man, and ruled in its natural grandeur, where one might range for days beyond the reach of civilization, so called, among the wild haunts of nature ; where the storms of winter might rage at their will, and tear the forests and uproot the oaks of a century, and crowd the swollen foaming torrents over the boulders till they roar, then return to the lamenting trees and heap the hollows with snow, and drench the mountains with hail and lashing rain ; or where peaceful summer might sleep and dream in soft shadows, lulled by purling brooks, the whisper of infinite leaves, the warble of happy birds, and the murmurous hum of swarms of innumerable insects.

The house itself was, as I have said, rectangular in shape. A great *portone* in the centre led at once into a large square hall paved with stone, occupying the entire depth of the house, and opening behind into a large balcony. Out of this on one side were the offices and storerooms, and on the other was a broad staircase leading to the first floor, where again was a great central hall of the full height of the house, out of which opened

all the bedrooms and the dining-room. The rooms occupied by Marco were in one corner, and the windows on either side were surrounded by a balcony which embraced them all. This had been his room as a boy, and here he had wished to return.

The house, which had originally been handsome, was now in very bad repair. Little by little the greater part of the antique furniture had been sold by the old count to raise money ; and only here and there remained a large carven wardrobe, a worm-eaten chest, a range of old benches with backs, a few ancient chairs, and a considerable number of old pictures. All the valuable pictures had long since gone, and what remained were of little value as works of art, though they still served to garnish the walls. Among them were stiff portraits of the family, pictures of old dried-up saints, a few Holy Families, some Santa Susannas, and one or two large battle-pieces. Beside these were a considerable number of old prints, framed and hung in various rooms, some of them interesting, many of them curious, representing all sorts of subjects, from caricatures of the fashions of previous centuries in odd costumes to proof impressions of Marc

Antonio. But throughout there was a look of dilapidation. The wainscotings were soiled and stained, the ceilings defaced, the floors without a vestige of a carpet, and no repairs had evidently been made for years, save those which were absolutely necessary.

The stables, which were large, lay behind the house, but they harbored now only a donkey and a cow ; and in the square courtyard were a score or two of hens, who were running and cackling about, under the supervision of two or three masterful cocks, the sultans of the yard, with their coral crests and wattles, brilliant necks and waving tails; who strutted proudly and daintily about, picking their steps and lording it over their meek harems with a magnificent superiority. A few extremely foolish turkeys bridled up as Marco entered the court, and swelled their wattles and thrust out their necks and gabbled at him as if they had something of importance to say, whereas, in point of fact, their gabbling was quite as senseless as the talk of the most fashionable saloons.

After making a general survey of the whole place, Marco returned, took his breakfast, and inquired all the news of the place and the people about, and Pietro and Maria

answering by turns, and sometimes both together, told him that — “Oliva was still quite well and strong, though Julia, her little girl — signor, you remember Julia — was *così così* only, and they had sent her down to the sea for baths. And Narcisso, *si* signor, Narcisso Stam, *bene*, and was going to marry Marietta, the daughter of Nina of the Padre Nuoro; and the old priest was well too, God be praised! — a good man, always ready to do what he could for his flock. And poor old Fidele, he died during the winter; and it was true, as Padre Anselmo said, that he was spared any more suffering, for he did suffer, you know, very much, poor man, with a toad in his stomach, they say. But who can tell. Ser Mimo, our doctor, said that was all nonsense. It was only brown kitties in his throat. But I don’t see that that was much better. However, whether it was a toad or brown kitties, he died, and peace be with him. And the winter had been hard, very hard, for all the poor people. But what will you? Winter is always hard upon the poor. Now they are doing well, with the strawberries and mushrooms and raspberries in the forests. Mushrooms! I think so, by thousands, sig-

nor. Oh yes ; now is the time for them, as many as you like — the woods are full of them. Adone was here only yesterday with two great baskets full, which he was taking down to Revi for sale. The Lord bless us ! why did we not take some for you ? Ah, what a pity ! But then we did n't know you were coming, that 's true. Your letter only got here after he had gone. The garden ! Oh yes, signor ; it 's a picture to see. The peas are all up well, and as many as you want ; and the beans too — great big *ceccini* beans, that you like so much. Oh yes ; I remember how you used to like them, you and the count of blessed memory, your father, and that other signor that came here now and then, and said, ' Come, Marietta, you have n't forgotten the beans, have you ? ' ' No, Signor Principe, ' I said, ' not I. ' And then how merry all used to be. Well, well, no one comes now, *pazienza* ; but, as I was saying, the beans are ripening now, and finer beans you will not find ; and the tomatoes are coming on well. Of course they 're not ripe yet. I know you like them too ; and the beets and the carrots, and the *zucche* and the potatoes. Oh, you won't starve here for want of vegetables ! Beppa ? Oh yes ; she

is well. She was asking the other day about you, signor, and when you were coming. And I had to say, '*Dio mio!* who knows?' She will be glad to see you. As soon as they know you are here, they will all be up to see you. We can't do what they can do in Rome for you; but, *pazienza*, we will try and do all we can. Too good, too good, in you, signor, to say so. We are only poor people, and cannot do much; but as Padre Anselmo says, 'A plate of beans from a friend is better than a fat ox of an enemy,' with good will, you know, signor; and that at least we have. And speaking of oxen, we shall have to have a couple of oxen, I am afraid, signor. We sold the others well at the fair last autumn; but we cannot get along without them. And next week there is the fair up at Bolena. Well, well; we will talk about that later when you have looked about. I know where there is a good pair. Leave that to me, signor. A man will have to get up early in the morning to deceive me about an ox. But we are chattering here and making a noise, when we ought to be at work. Come, Maria, be off, the Signor Conte has heard enough for the present; and I, too, must be off. I

suppose you, signor, will like to look over the place, at your convenience I mean, at your convenience. You won't like to be troubled to-day with business, and all's going on right. And have you any commands now? Ah, none. *Le riverisa*, signor." And off the worthy pair went.

This was somewhat different from Rome, and Marco felt that he was in another world. He smiled to himself as he finished his breakfast, and then wandered through the house and into all the rooms, so full of reminiscences, and passed in review all the old pictures and prints, and peered into every odd closet and nook, and mounted into the attic and gazed curiously at its old brown rafters, and smelled again the dusty odor that brought him back so vividly all the old days of youth. There is nothing like odors to recall the past, and verify in our minds the life that is gone,—one whiff of a flower will turn the key that opens the door to a thousand thronging memories. And wandering through these rooms, almost at moments the years fell off from him, and he felt a boy again,—he heard the voice of his father calling him from below, the shout of his playmates hiding in corners of

the attic. He stumbled over an old wooden horse, with broken legs and battered head, that once was the pride of his boyhood, and that lay in a dim corner of the attic, thrown away, who knows, how many a year ago, and he took it up and gazed earnestly at it, and smiled, and moisture came into his eyes. Then he sighed and laid it down again carefully, and said to himself, — “Poor Carlino, where is he now? and where are the days when we played together, careless of the future, pleased with the present, never foreseeing nor caring to foresee. Poor Carlino, where are you now? Gone where no voice of mine can reach you, and where no voice of yours will ever reach me.”

Then he left the attic and went down to his room, and the passing memory fled like a dream. Next to this room was another opening out from it, in which the library was kept. He opened the windows, to drive away the musty smell and let the sunshine in, and gave a glance over the books. They were mostly old, printed centuries ago, and bound in limp vellum; books that none but a student ever opens, and which have no current breath of modern life in them — ecclesiastical histories and lives of the saints,

and sermons and tracts and windy essays, and geography, and the works of the fathers and the priests. Among them, however, were the Latin poets and writers, the standard works of Italian literature of a later date, a few French books and romances, and, of course, the Italian poets and novelists of a previous age. "Some day I must look carefully over these," he thought. "Possibly there may be some of real interest and value; at all events, the poets are here, and they live forever, and here I shall find quiet friends, ready to be taken up and put down at my will, never presuming, and never forcing themselves upon me, at whom I can laugh without hurting their feelings, whom I can criticise without any self-justification or argument on their parts, whom I can even abuse without rousing their anger."

After lingering here for an hour he went out; and the rest of his day was spent in going over the place, looking at the fields that were planted, examining all the buildings, wandering about the woods, and exchanging a word or two now and then with some of the peasants whom he met. The day thus pleasantly slipped away, and he was glad at night to go to bed early and take a long refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

UNEVENTFULLY the days went by. The silence, the solitude charmed him. He joyed in the delicious breath of the summer, that, stealing perfume from the myriad wild flowers profusely blooming everywhere, fanned his brow and cheek, and awakened many a poetic thought, or feeling at least, in his mind. After the hot, stifling air of the city, and its noisy vanities, the fresh unbreathed wind of the mountains filled him with strength and purpose and hope. Work was distasteful to him. He desired to be lazy, aimless, solitary, to be at friends with Nature, not to question or dispute with her, but to lay out his heart to her influence, and let her say and do what she would. He wished not to torment her, but to open his heart to her, and leave her free to sow her wandering seeds and breathe her influence over him, without labor or conscious effort on his part, just as the broad fields that lie open to the sunshine, and without effort let the sun and

the air grow their harvest in her bosom. He was tired of his studies, tired of catechising Nature, and wilfully plucking her fruits, and persistingly demanding her favors, and thus tormenting her and himself. "She will give me what she chooses now," he said ; "I will not be a beggar, nor importune her more. Now for long fallow days of idleness. I will turn Art out of doors, and let her stray, and wander at her own free will, nor longer chain and harness her to work. And for myself, Pegasus has been too long under the yoke. I feel my imagination narrowing. Let him free his wings and soar away wherever his impulse guides him."

So Marco took no sketch-book with him to hunt down Nature and despoil her. He said, "When the time comes, I will work ; but out of this aimless communion something at last, not wilfully sought for, may come. At all events, I will give myself a chance."

Day after day he roamed up and down the forests and the valleys, sometimes climbing some stony bridle-path that more resembled the rocky bed carved out by a swollen torrent than a road. Sometimes lying for hours at length under the shade of the beech-

trees, gazing at their sunny wavering roof of light and dark green leaves, that seemed paved against the blue sky beyond. Sometimes wandering for miles through the cathedral aisles of tall firs, whose serried columns reared high up above his head, and swayed and whispered with a sea-like murmur as the wind sifted through them, and then when wearied flinging himself on their carpet of brown needles to rest. Sometimes seeking for mushrooms, that thrust their brown heads out of the soil ; or plucking some wild flower, and pondering its curiously exquisite forms ; or watching the busy trains of ants, endlessly at work on who knows what ; or the idle butterflies drifting here and there ; or the hot and restless bees, that bustle from flower to flower to rifle them of their sweetness, weighing them down and plunging into them their slender trunks ; or the swarms of unknown winged insects, that circled around and around and gleamed in the sunshine.

At times, as he lay dreaming, the voices of peasants came to him through the far aisles of the forest, and then passed by, some with a great load of fagots on their heads, some with a couple of baskets poised on a

stick over their shoulders, old and young, maidens and men and old women, all bearing the spoils of the forest to the neighboring villages. Pausing, they saluted him with a greeting now and then, asked him for a *sous*, and once in a while stopped and talked with him for a few moments, and then moved on. He watched them as they walked erectly through the trees, picturesque in their colored cotton gowns, each of the women with a red figured handkerchief bound about her head, and all busy — all intent on something.

“Nothing seems idle here,” he thought, “save the butterflies. Even that great hawk that poises far up in the blue, and sweeps majestically and easily in broad circles and curves, though he seems scarcely to move his wings, and to hover there in pure enjoyment, is still at work seeking for his prey. All are busy, all preying on something or anxious for something. There seems to be no such thing as entire rest and peace in all this swarming life. The very wind is busy, the clouds are travelling somewhere; and in this very rest of mine there is no rest, for my thoughts are going without my will and beyond my will, in a sort of aimless course.

“Rest, I suppose, would be death. There is nothing living that is at rest.”

In dreamy thoughts like these, at times he would fall asleep and doze for a time; and then rousing, would plunge deeper into the forest, or climb some precipitous height, and hot and panting would take off his hat and feel the fresh breeze bathe his forehead, and draw in large draughts of invigorating air, and stretch out his arms, and feel a wholesome delight in being alone and out of the world.

Then he would return to the house, wander in the garden and watch the peas and beans as they grew day by day, twining up their trellis of *fraschi*, and blossoming and swelling their pods; or lie upon the balustrade of the wall, and idly pick from the corners the weeds that grew beneath his hand; or sit on the old stone trough in the courtyard, and watch the cocks and hens, and scatter crumbs and grain to them to eat as they gathered about him; or hunt for their eggs in the hay; or pat the donkey, and talk to him and flatter him, — idling about, now here, now there, with no fixed purpose, simply living and drinking in the air, and tormenting his spirit with no agitation of work.

And so went on some ten days, and then this utter idleness began somewhat to weary him. His spirit, sick at first, had needed it; but as the fresh air gave him new life, the sluggish current of his thoughts began to stir in him, and now and then when he went out he carried his fishing-rod and line, and amused himself by catching some of the trout that abounded in the torrent that poured down the clefts of the mountains; or took some volume from the library in his pocket, and read it as he lay under the shade; or dotted down verses of his own, when some casual expression in one of the poets he was reading set fire to his own thoughts. Gradually, too, art began to re-assume its rights and insist upon its claim, and would not longer be dismissed. Many a happy accident of light and shade and form and color met him everywhere, and seemed to cry out to him, and beseech him so strenuously that he could not resist their persuasion, and even against his will he found himself forced to yield and to sketch them. Old habits came back, and he began to forecast many a picture to be worked out on canvas.

Returning home towards twilight from one of these excursions into the woods, he

heard the sound of voices in the hall. One of these voices was that of old Maria ; the other was evidently that of some young girl, clear, penetrating, and of a singularly sweet vibration. He paused for a moment, wondering who it could be. It was evidently not that of a peasant, so he thought at least, nor of any one whom he knew. His curiosity was roused. Suddenly the girl laughed a low laugh, and said : “ Well, Sera Maria, night is coming on and I must go. *Addio*, then, and the strawberries you will give to the Signor Conte from the Nonna, who wishes him all happiness, and hopes some day to see him, as soon as she is rid of her rheumatism. *Poverina*, she is not able to take such a walk now, or she would have come before. *Addio*.”

Both came to the door together, and Maria then saw Marco. “ Ah ! here is the *padrone* now,” she cried. “ This is Fiammetta, Signor Conte, the granddaughter of Antonio and Gigia of the Casetta. She has just come to bring you some strawberries from the Nonna. You remember her, do you not ? ”

“ Fiammetta ! ” said Marco. “ This cannot be little Fiammetta. How she has grown and changed ! ”

"Ah! signor," cried Maria, "the years go by; we all change, and some of us not for the better. *Pazienza*; but this is Fiammetta. You remember the Signor Conte, Fiammetta?"

"Oh yes, I remember him," said Fiammetta, simply.

"How tall you have grown!" said Marco, as he looked at her steadily. "Whatever Maria may say, you have not changed for the worse."

The girl smiled, and then a sudden rush of blood came into her face; but she did not cast her eyes down or look away. On the contrary, she gazed steadily at Marco, and for a moment there was a silence as they stood looking intently at each other. Then Marco stretched out his hand to her and she to him, and they shook hands.

"I am glad to see you again," he said, "though I should never have recognized you; you have so changed since I last saw you. You were then a little child."

"*Grazie*, signor," she answered. "Yes; I was a child then."

"And you are still at the Casetta with your grandmother."

"Yes, signor."

"That is some five miles away from here."

"Yes, signor ; I believe so."

"Please thank your Nonna for the strawberries. It was very kind of her to send them to me, and tell her I hope she will soon be well of her rheumatism ; and — and — tell her I will come and see her soon."

"I will do as you bid me, signor."

"You will have a long walk, and it is getting late."

"It is nothing to me," she answered, and smiled.

"Oh, Fiammetta does not care for five miles more than I do for going out to the garden," exclaimed Maria. "What are five miles to a lass like that? nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing."

"But," said Marco, "the path is wild and lonely ; and are you not afraid to go alone ?"

"Afraid !" she cried, "of what ? I am afraid of nothing."

"No ; that she is not," cried Maria. "Are you, Fiammetta ?"

She laughed, and drew herself up ; and a gleam flashed out of her eyes, but she said nothing.

"You must keep her here to-night, Maria,"

said Marco. "I do not like to let her go alone in the dark over the mountains. Give her a bed here, and she will return in the morning."

"Certainly, signor," said Maria. "You had better stay perhaps, Fiammetta. We can put you up and make you comfortable."

"Thank you, Signor Conte," she answered. "You are very good, but I cannot stay. Nonna will expect me. She will worry about me if I do not return, and I am not afraid. No one would dare to touch me. Let them try it if they like," and she laughed. "None the less, a thousand thanks to you, and *a rivederla*, Signor Conte; and *addio*, Maria."

So saying, she walked away. Marco watched her until her figure was lost in the trees, and then turning away said: "What a beautiful girl!"

And so in truth she was. She was not only beautiful, but of a singular character of beauty, difficult to describe. Scarcely above the middle height, but so slender that she looked even taller than she was; pliant of figure, delicate in the waist, with full rounded bosom and arms, and small hands and feet, and in her motions quick, agile,



buoyant. Her eyes were large and dark, and lay couched under low square brows, with a clear light in them, and an expression of shyness and yet directness and fearlessness, like what one sees at times in the eyes of some wild free animal, ready to brave attack or to yield to affection. Her nose was straight; her nostrils thin; her mouth and chin full; her complexion dark and bronzed like a gypsy's; and when she smiled she showed a range of milk-white teeth, such as one rarely sees except in the peasant class. Her dark face, when at rest, was serious; but when she smiled, it seemed as when a sudden burst of sunshine comes out of a thunder-cloud and illuminates it with splendor. On her head she wore a red-figured handkerchief tied behind in a knot; and from beneath this, tendrils of black hair, crisp and curling, issued and played over her brow and cheeks. Her dress was of the simplest kind — made of a colored print, which many a washing had faded into a delicate tone — with short sleeves reaching scarcely to the elbow, low in the neck, fitting closely over the shoulders, and loosely girdled in at the waist. Her figure was spoiled by no corsets, her

under dress was evidently very slight, and the graceful contours of her shoulders, young bosom, and hips showed in every movement. She was in figure the type of the Youthful Huntress of the silver bow: lithe, long-limbed, and smoothly rounded. The sun had burnt her to a glowing brown; her cheeks were like a ripe summer fruit, and she looked as if she had only been a companion of the winds and the streams and the mountains, and had never known the polluting civilization of a city.

Marco watched her silently as she disappeared among the trees; once only she turned at the last point at which she was clearly visible, paused a moment, looked back, cried with a clear ringing voice, "*Addio!*" and sprang away out of sight like a fawn.

"So that is Fiammetta," said Marco, turning round to Maria. "What a wonderful beauty she is!"

"Yes," said Maria; "she is a beautiful girl, and a strange girl too; but she does not seem to care about her looks. She will have nothing to say to any of the men about here, and will not listen to them nor their compliments, not she — she has not the

least idea of what you call love. Oh, blessed Virgin, no! Love indeed! — let anybody try to make love to her, and she will burst into a fit of laughter, snap her fingers and leap away, crying out to her suitor, ‘*Sciocco!*’ — fool. She’s a curious creature, indeed — fierce as a snake, when she is roused; and as she told you herself, afraid of nobody and nothing. Nobody has ever been able to tame her, though she is gentle enough, too, — if you are kind to her. But her old Nonna can’t get much work out of her, though she is now well sixteen years old, when we others have to take our share of burdens and work. But no, signor, no; she will do nothing of the kind. She will take care of the hens and the ducks, and the cow and the donkey; but she will not work, as the others do. A queer girl, indeed. She will fling her arms round the old cow’s neck and kiss her and sing to her, and go on sometimes like a mad girl; but no men for her. They’ve all tried it again and again and given it up. Hour after hour, day after day, she is gone by herself in the woods, and nobody knows what she does there. Roams about there like a sort of wild creature, and gathers strawberries and raspberries, and any

wild fruit she can find. But she won't sell them — no, signor ; and then she knows how to charm the birds. Yes, signor, she does ; she charms the birds. How she does it, I don't know ; but somehow or other she does it."

"What do you mean when you say she charms the birds ?" asked Marco.

"Oh, she just charms them, with a sort of incantation."

"How does she do it ?"

"She just sits down, signor — I have seen her do it a hundred times — on the bank of any stream, and then she will lift up her hands slowly and wave them about in a circle, as if she was drawing figures in the air, and then she will begin to croon a little, low song, that sounds for all the world, signor, like the running of a brook ; and, after a time — one after another — the birds will begin to gather in the air, far up, and then down, down, down they will come and flutter and flutter, and then come lower down and light on her shoulders and lap ; and she will go on singing and play with them as if they belonged to her. Oh ! you may smile, signor ; what I tell you is true — as true as Gospel. I have seen her do it twenty times.



I do not know what her secret is, nor what she says ; but, signor, the birds do, and they come to her when she calls. Blessed Virgin ! it is strange ; but it does not seem to be evil, signor. Some say she is a magician, but I don't know. They go to her for charms against diseases — all kinds of diseases — and what she gives them I don't know ; but they say she can drive away fever and all that. I scarcely believe it, but the people around here say so."

"But what does her grandmother say to all this?"

"Oh, *poverina*, she is used to her by this time, and well she may be ; and as she finds she cannot control her, she lets her go as she will, and do as she chooses. And after all she is a good girl — I must say that. I never knew her do any harm to any one. A kind, good girl, ready to do any kindness to any one ; and she never talks against her neighbors, and hates noise and quarrelling, and runs away when it begins. There are people enough, signor, that like to talk against everybody, but she does n't, and she is good-tempered, too, if she is treated kindly. But if any one attempts to oppose her violently, or to abuse and insult her, she is like

a tiger-cat. I never saw eyes flame as hers will; and those long, slender little hands of hers I should not like to have round my throat, as once Adone had, when he insulted her and swore at her (poor fellow, he was half-drunk when he did it) but he seized her once and swore she should kiss him. But he counted without his host, signor. He did indeed. One might as well have tried to hold a snake; and her fingers made marks in his throat that he wore for a week. He was sorry for it, and so was she, when he said he was sorry and begged her pardon. But he never tried that game again."

"No; I should think not. She does not look like a girl that would stand that sort of nonsense," said Marco.

"Not she; ah, it's in her blood. You see, one can never get rid of one's blood."

"In her blood! What do you mean by that?"

"Why, signor, you know her history, don't you?"

"No; I know nothing of her history, save that I remember her as a queer little girl that I once used to see years ago."

"Don't you remember her mother, too? You must have seen her when you were a little boy."

"If I ever knew her, she has gone out of my memory."

"Ah, but she has n't out of mine. I shall never forget her and her doings."

"Tell me her history."

"Well, it was this, signor. She was the only child of Antonio and Gigia — that is, the only one that lived and grew up — all the others died young. Only Tonietta lived, and a brave, striking-looking girl she was, not so good-looking as Fiammetta, but, *via*, something of that kind. Dark and tall and proud and fierce, and had high notions of herself, and always hated her work; and looked down, I know not why, upon all of us. Well, it so happened, when she was about eighteen — perhaps nineteen — a gentleman came to stay here, and he hired that little house that we call the Fossetta. You remember it — over the hills there — near the Marchese Alessandro. He was not an Italian, but he came from a far-away country. Stop! what did they call it? — up there among the Polacchi, or Russii, or Spagnoli, or Americani; but it was not there he came from — some place near there beginning with a B. Beemy, I think it was."

"Bohemia," suggested Marco.

“ Ah, yes! that was it — Beemia. He was a tall handsome man, young, maybe some thirty years of age, more or less, and he wore a queer kind of dress, all over frogs and buttons, and had high boots, and such a costume as I never saw before. Well, he came here to spend a few weeks during the summer, to roam about and collect flowers, and to shoot partridges and quails, and I know not what. Well, while he was shooting in the woods one day, he met Tonietta, and he stopped and talked with her a long while; and Tonietta was very proud of this, and again and again he met her, and he kept staying on at the Fossetta long into the autumn; and every day he used to saunter down towards Gigia’s house, and Tonietta would make some excuse to go with him; and at last Gigia told her she must stay at home, and that no good would come of such goings on, and that the gentleman was only amusing himself with her and making a tool of her, and that the end of it would be her ruin. But Tonietta was headstrong and would not listen, and thought she knew better than all the world. And Antonio had a long talk with her one day, and told her that if he caught her again walking with

this foreign gentleman, playing the *civetta*, he would lock her up in her room and keep her there till the gentleman went away. But the next day the same thing happened, and Antonio saw them through the trees, and he called out loudly to her, and she fled away home. And then, blessed Virgin, what a row there was! There was the devil's own porridge boiling in the house. Antonio called her a fool, and worse than a fool, and abused her roundly, and said she would disgrace her family, if she had n't already, and that he would look to it now. So he locked her up in her room, and took the key away, and that, he thought, would end the matter. But the next day the cage was empty — Tonietta was gone! She had slipped out of the window early in the morning or late at night — nobody knew when — only they knew *that* was the way she got out, because the bed-clothes were knotted together into a sort of rope, and hanging to the sill of the window out of which she had got. Well, of course, they sought for her everywhere, but they could not find her, and could get no news of her; and the poor people were topsy-turvy with anxiety and fear. At last, after about a week, Pasquale — our Pas-

quale, you know — came and made it all plain. He had been sent for by the gentleman to drive him down to N——, and when they were half-way there who should they see but Tonietta sitting on a stone under the trees, just off the road at the four corners where the cross is, and out got the stranger, and off he went with her into the wood, telling Pasquale to wait; and Pasquale did wait, and after an hour or so they came back together and got into the carriage, and the stranger cried to him, ‘Now be off, and let’s see if your horses can go!’ And go they did, for Pasquale’s horses know how to go, and soon they were there; and the stranger went in to buy the tickets for the railroad, and left Tonietta there alone. And Pasquale said to her, ‘Well, my beauty,’ says he, ‘do you expect to go back with me? If you do, you are mistaken, for I have got to go on for another job, and shall be away for several days,’ says he; ‘so you ’ll have a long walk of it, Tonietta, and a pretty mess you have made!’ But she said, ‘You need not trouble yourself — it’s all right.’ ‘I should think so,’ says he; and says she, ‘You attend to your own affairs;’ and says he, ‘I just will; but if you ’ll take a friend’s

advice, you will go back as you came and at once, though it's none of my business,' says he. 'Oh!' says she, 'Pasquale,' says she, 'never you mind, nor never you bother your head about me — it's all right. But you can do me one service,' says she. 'And what's that?' says he. 'And it's this,' says she; 'tell them at home that they need not expect to see me for some time at least. I am going to be married to this gentleman,' says she, 'and to be a lady,' says she, 'and to go away, far, far off, and live in a great palace,' says she, 'and I shall send them money and clothes; and give them my love, and tell them I can't write anything now, and tell them I was sorry not to say good-by,' says she; 'but they would never have let me go if I had,' says she. 'And say good-by for me, and all sorts of things, you know; and don't forget and give them my love, and tell them not to trouble about me — it's all right!'

"Well, well; so it was, and so Pasquale said; and the poor old people were grieved enough at first, and shook their heads, and wondered how it would all turn out, and hoped for the best, but did not have much faith of any good end. And so the months

went on and on ; and the winter came, and the spring, and the summer, and the autumn again, and no Tonietta, and no news of her nor of the stranger ; and they were all alone, and the evenings were dreary to them as they sat and looked into the coals and sighed, and sometimes talked about her, and sometimes sat and gazed and said nothing of all that was working in their minds.

“ And so, as I said, the autumn came ; and it was a dreary autumn and cold — very cold, I remember, that year — and there came on a great storm one night at the end of November. It was the storm that blew down that great chestnut, some two hundred years old, they said, that stood over at the falls ; and the rain beat against the panes and lashed them furiously, and the trees roared and groaned as in torment ; and the blast came down the mountains howling like a mad spirit of the devil, and shaking the very house. And Antonio was sitting alone that night over the embers, as usual, mending a hoe — for Gigia had already gone to bed — when he thought he heard a cry as of a human voice. He listened ; but it was not repeated, and he thought it might be a fiend, and he crossed himself and said, ‘ *Domini,*

patre nostore, ora per nobi!' and went on mending his hoe. And after a minute or two he heard a knock at the door, and this, he thought too, was imagination, for who could be there at such a time? And then the knock came again, and a cry like what he heard before, and he said to himself, he said, 'Some one of the neighbors must be dying,' and he got up and went to the door and opened it, and the wind and storm burst in and blinded him at first, and then he saw out in the dark the dim form of a woman, with a shawl drawn over her head and covering her face, and he cried out, 'Who are you? and what do you want?' for he could not see for the wind and the rain, and the dim light within and the darkness without: and there was no answer. 'Who are you?' cried he again; 'come in out of the storm!' And then the woman cried out, 'Oh, *babbo, babbo!* don't you know me?' Antonio's knees, he said, shook under him; he thought it must be a ghost; he could not speak; and then the figure tottered forward to him, and cried out again, 'Oh, *babbo, babbo!*' and fell senseless upon the door-sill. And he bent down and lifted her shawl from her face, and cried out 'Tonietta!' and then he rushed to

the stairs, and called out, 'Gigia! Gigia! quick! come down! Here is Toniетта, and dying!' And Gigia hurried down all like a mad person, without stopping to put on anything but an old shawl; and they lifted up Toniетта, who was quite gone in a faint, and laid her upon a settle; and when they took off the old shawl they saw that she clasped to her breast a bundle, and this they unwrapped, and there was a little baby; but they had n't any time to think of that, and they laid it down softly, and attended to Toniетта; and after a time she opened her eyes as if she were dazed, and stared at them, and then felt in her bosom and cried out, 'My baby!' 'It's all safe,' said Gigia; and then Toniетта burst into a fit of crying, and said, '*Babbo, babbo!* oh, *babbo!* oh, mamma, mamma! Is it a dream? — are you here? — are you here, really? — really? *O Dio! Dio! Dio!* have pity on me!' and then she got up staggering, and fell upon her mother's breast and wept, and cried all sorts of things. And they soothed her at last, and took off her wet clothes and put her to bed, and gave her some wine and rubbed her well, for she was nearly frozen; and the baby, too, they laid on the bed at her side. Poor little

thing ! she had kept it warm against her heart all that cold, bitter night, when she herself was nearly frozen."

"And that baby was Fiammetta?" said Marco.

"Yes, signor, that baby was Fiammetta — or Gitana, as we call her — because she has such a gypsy look and something so odd about her."

"And Tonietta, her mother, what became of her?"

"Oh, poor thing ! she never looked up after that night — never again was strong, and slowly pined away. What with the disgrace and the sufferings she had undergone, and the disappointment and that cruel night, she was beaten down to the earth and broken like a tree snapped in the tempest. She went about looking like a shadow of her former self ; never laughed, and her smile was sad enough to make you cry. And to make a long story short — for I am afraid I have been talking too much — she slowly pined away, like a wounded creature that some hunter has shot ; and at last we carried her up to the churchyard, and there she lies — at peace at last !"

"Did she never tell the story of what happened to her during her absence?"

“ Oh, yes, signor ; little by little it all came out, and Gigia has often told it to me. The gentleman carried her away off to a far, far country ; and at first he was very kind to her, and gave her beautiful dresses and necklaces, and was proud of her ; and she lived in a beautiful house and had no work to do, and was happy, and he kept saying he would marry her and make a great lady of her. But after a time, — oh dear me, signor, it is all the old story, just what, of course, any one might guess without being much of a magician, — he began to go away, and be gone for weeks on some excuse or other ; and at last, after being gone for more than a month, he came back, and somehow she saw by his face and his looks that something had happened, he was so altered. He tried, she said, to be kind ; but there was some strange difference. He had something on his mind and she knew it, and begged him to tell her what it was. But he would not say ; and then at last, after he had been there a few days, he came into the room, and sat down beside her and took her hands, and said, ‘Tonietta, this cannot go on any longer. It is of no use — I might as well tell you first as last — I must leave

you ; I am going to be married. You have been very good ; but' —

“ ‘ Married ! ’ she cried ; aghast, poor thing. ‘ Have you not always promised to marry me ? ’

“ ‘ Be reasonable,’ he said ; ‘ that you know is impossible.’

“ ‘ Why, impossible. Did you not promise me on your honor to marry me ? Why did you make me come away with you ? ’

“ ‘ Whether I promised or not is not the question. What I wish you to understand is, that it is impossible now ; for I am pledged to marry another.’

“ ‘ And who is she ? ’ said Tonietta.

“ ‘ No matter who she is,’ he said.

“ ‘ I will find her out. I will tell her all. If she has any heart she will never let me be cast away thus. Oh, it is horrible ! it is horrible ! What shall I do ? I will find her ; I will.’

“ ‘ No ; you will never find her,’ he said ; ‘ and it would be useless if you did. You need not storm and cry. That will do no good.’

“ ‘ Oh, I could not believe you would be so base, so infamous ! ’ she cried. ‘ To bring me away here, where I am all alone, and

then to break your word, and abandon me, and ruin me. Oh, what a fool I have been!’ and she wept and grieved and begged; but he remained like a stone. Yes, like a stone, she said.

“‘And so you throw me off, and leave me here a beggar, in a far land beyond all my friends.’

“‘Ah, no! not that,’ he said. ‘You shall not say that. You shall not be a beggar as you say. You shall, on the contrary, be cared for, and be rich, and be able to do what you will.’

“And then he took out of his pocket a great pocket-book, and a purse, and said, ‘There are,’ — I don’t know how many thousands of francs he said; but it was a very large sum, more than I ever saw, signor. ‘That is yours to do with it what you like; to go back to your country if you will; to stay here if you will,’ and he laid the money down on the table.

“Then she rose, wiped away her tears, took the pocket-book and purse and flung them on the ground, and said, ‘I will have none of them; not one *sous*; I will go; I will buy my way back. Nothing will I have of yours. You are an infamous man!’

“‘You ’ll think better of it when the morning comes,’ he said. ‘Don’t be a fool. Take the money : it is yours, and you have a right to it.’

“‘It is the wages of sin,’ she cried. ‘I will not touch it. While you loved me, or said you did at least, I would take anything from you. What was mine was yours, and what was yours was mine. Now it is different. You are a base man. I gave you my love freely, trustingly. You have betrayed me. My curse shall be on you wherever you go.’

“‘There is no use,’ he said, ‘to talk with you now. You are too excited to reason. I will leave you and come to see you to-morrow, when you are quieter. I leave the money. If you will not touch it, I will not. There it is.’

“And then he went away and left her ; and she stormed and cried for hours all the long evening ; and then she sat down and leaned her face on both her hands, and thought what she should do ; and then she went into her bedroom and selected out of all her clothes a few of the stoutest, some that she had bought in the first days of their love, and those she bound up in a

bundle ; and then she looked over the drawers where her ornaments were, and out of these she chose a few rings, and a necklace or two, and a couple of bracelets, and she said to herself, ‘ These at least I can take ; they were the gifts of love, they belong to me ; and what can I do without money, as he says, here, so far away from everybody.’ Then her spirit revolted, for Tonietta was very proud, and she laid them all down again, and said, ‘ No ! I will have nothing of his — nothing. I will go away as I came.’ Then she lay down on the bed, and after a while she fell asleep, crying bitterly, poor thing, and got a little rest. At the earliest break of day she rose, dressed herself, enclosed all the money in a letter addressed to him, and left it on the table, then took her bundle, placed it on her head as she used to do, as we all do here, and walked out of the house. Where she was going she did not know. She did not care. The whole world was nothing to her now. She only wanted to go somewhere and die. Somewhere to hide herself in, where he should not find her.

“ And so she went on, the whole day, out of the town into the high-road, and when night came on, worn-out and hungry, she

stopped at a house and begged for a crust of bread, and the people were kind and gave it to her, for she was a stranger, and there was something in her manner and voice that touched them, and then she thanked them and journeyed on, and slept that night under a hay-rick; and in the morning she was off again by daybreak, and inquired the way to Italy of some persons she met on the road; but some of them knew of no such place, and some knew not how she should go. At last, however, she met a gentleman, and she inquired of him, and he looked at her, and asked her if she was an Italian, and said it was a long way off, and he seemed to pity her, and told her the way, and spoke to her in her own language, and asked her how she expected to get there, and why she did not take a coach or diligence; and she smiled sadly, and said, 'Ah! signor, how can I go in a diligence? I have not a *sous* even to buy my bread.' And then he said, 'There's a gold piece for you.' 'For me?' she said; 'Why, I did not ask for money.' 'But you will need it,' says he, 'and take it, please. You make me think of the happy days I spent in Italy. You will do me a pleasure if you will take it.' 'May God bless you!'

said she, and she took it and went on. So day after day passed, and one evening she came upon an encampment of gypsies, and she walked up to them. They were boiling a kettle over a fire of sticks, and the savor of the mess was good to her nostrils, for she was very tired and hungry, and she looked wistfully at it. An old woman was seated there, and two stately girls stood beside her, and two or three men were moving about the tents, and she said, '*Buona, sera!*' and they all looked at her for a moment, and then one of the girls came forward and spoke to her in a language she did not understand, and she shook her head and smiled; and the girl again spoke, and again she shook her head, and said, '*Sono Italiana,*' and then the girl said, also in Italian, 'I thought you were a gypsy too at first,' and they all nodded their heads. Then they asked her to sit down, and they gave her of their broth, and they were kind to her, and she told them she was poor and was going back to Italy, and did not know if she should ever get there. And they said, 'Will you go with us? we are going that way.' And she said she would. So she went with them, and she worked for

them, and they told her they knew she was a gypsy though she would not acknowledge it; and the two girls became her great friends, and she told them her story, and they were kinder than ever, and then they taught her to tell fortunes by the hand, signor, and all sorts of things they taught her, and they were very careful of her, for they saw she was approaching her time to have a child. Their journeys were short, and when she was tired they gave her a seat in their great wagon. And so they came down into Italy. And one beautiful autumn day, while the encampment was resting for a week or two, she gave birth to a little girl, our little Fiammetta. She was very ill after this; but the gypsies nursed her well, and gradually she grew stronger, though she could not walk long, and most of the journeys she was in the wagon. Ah! she said, signor, she never could forget all their kindness. It was all as if she had come upon a band of Maritani like those in the Holy Book that Father Anselmo tells us about, who, he said, poured oil into wounds of a man who had been assassinated, though I never heard oil was good for wounds, that is, unless it had the St. John's wort leaves

in it, which they say are good for wounds. However, he meant to be kind, this Signor Maritano, and that is what I mean.

“ Well, well, signor ; there is not much more to tell, and I know I tell it badly ; but what would you ? I am only an *ignorante*. But to finish my story. At last Toniotta began to have a yearning for her home and her *babbo* and mamma, and had many a heartache when she thought of them, and she longed to see the old place. Ah ! we all of us do, signor, no matter how poor it may be. It keeps growing and growing and growing in our imaginations when we are away from it, and all the little pleasures live in our memories, and all the pains and troubles die, and there comes a sort of glory over the meanest things. *Madonna mia!* what a farm it seems to me was ours ; how big the house seems where I lived when I was a girl ! I suppose it is a poor little place enough, really, but it never seems so, and Pietro stops me instantly when I am bragging about it.

“ Well, all good things end at last, and so do all bad ones, too, for that matter ; and the autumn is always melancholy somehow or other, who knows why ? — and when the

cold days came and the rains set in, the open life in the country with her friends the gypsies, kind as they were, was more than she could bear, for she was no longer the stout, proud lass that she was when she went away, but sad and weak and broken in health and spirits ; and one day she said to them that she must go. They urged her to stay ; but it was of no use. She had to go ; it was in her mind that she must. It was not a matter of reasoning, nor of duty, nor of anything she could explain ; but it was just as a stream must go on and on, whether it will or no — of necessity, not of will.

“ And when the time came to go her heart came all up in her throat, she said ; and she cried till her eyes were red ; and she kissed and blessed all of them ; and they went with her a couple of miles, and then said a last good-by. And she had never thought of how she should get on without money, though she had a long, tedious journey before her, and was weak, and had her baby to carry ; and it was not till she had walked nearly all day, and was utterly tired out, that she began to ask herself what she should do. Then a sort of despair came over her, and she wished she had never left her friends ; for

there she was alone without a *sous*, and weak and unable to bear fatigue, and her baby dependent on her for milk, and a weary weight to bear, and the winds at night so cold even in the valleys that she dared not lie on the grass ; and what was she to do. As these thoughts came over her in a rush all together, she sank down on a stone by the wayside, and as she did this she heard something strike the stone with a clink. ‘What was it?’ she thought. ‘I do not remember that I have anything in my pocket to make a clink like that.’ Then she put her hand into her pocket, and found a little purse with six silver pieces in it, that the gypsies must have slipped in without her knowledge. Down she knelt on the grass and prayed for them ; and then revived, she went on ; and she soon found a shelter and a supper. Ah, signor ! to have nothing at such a time is terrible — when famine comes, and grins at us like a wild beast through the bars of a cage, and our sleep is full of fearful dreams.

“After a week’s toiling on, at last that fearful November night she came up the mountains. You know those stony, steep, hard paths. Poor creature ! it was all that she could do to climb up them, resting every

now and then for breath, chilled to the heart, wet to the skin. The wind raved — the storm drenched and beat against her — all the devils of the Inferno were in the trees screaming at her. She could scarcely see her footing — she constantly slipped down — and had she not known the path well, she could never have reached her home. But, blessed be the Virgin and all the saints! she did arrive at last, as I have told you.

“And that, Signor Conte, is what Gigia told me, and, I suppose, it is true. But I spoil it all in the telling.”

“It is a sad story enough,” said Marco. “Poor Tonietta! Let us hope that Fiammetta will have better luck.”

“Let us hope so; but who knows? She is so strange. She does not seem like one of us — has odd notions about everything. She must have got it from her father, I think, though there is a good deal of her mother in her too, I think sometimes; but, *Madonna mia!* what right have I to think about it? No matter; what will be will be, signor, as the saying goes.”

“Does she know all this story about her mother?”

“I don’t know; I suppose so — that is,

generally. I suppose she knows that her father was not one of us, and was a gentleman and a foreigner ; but how much more she knows I cannot say. Blood, signor, blood will tell ; and one cannot expect she should be like us, and as for who her father was, I don't think even Gigia knows ; and if she did, she would not tell Fiammetta. It would only give her wrong notions about herself, and make her discontented, and set her to dreaming about possibilities that can never occur. She might be expecting him to come and take her away, and make a grand lady of her, and give her a fortune, or any such foolish thing."

"And nothing has ever been heard of him since ?" asked Marco.

"Nothing, signor. He went out of all our knowledge, and of Tonietta's too, like a candle blown out by the wind. He came and he went, and that is all we know. Who he was nobody knows, not even the Marchesa, who used to meet him, and talk with him ; but he was a gentleman, that we know. You could not see him without knowing that, for he had certain high ways about him, and his hands were white and small, and long-fingered, just like Fiammetta's, if you looked

at them, but I suppose you did not: they are long and small too. But, dear me, how I am talking on! Pray excuse me, Signor Conte, I am afraid I have tired you out, and, with permission, I will go and prepare your supper now, if you please. It is getting late, and I have been chattering here too long."

"Thanks! thanks!" said Marco. "You have, on the contrary, interested me very much. It is a very curious story, and a very interesting one."

And Maria then went away. Marco stood at the door and looked out and mused. The dying light was faint in the west; the vast shadows were filling the valley; the mountains became dark silhouettes against the sky; the *grilli* were chirping a continuous low song in the grass, and a mystery was spreading over all the world. The story that Maria had told profoundly interested him, and the peculiar figure and expression of Fiammetta, her voice, her bearing, the look in her eyes, short as their interview had been, had left a singular impression on his mind. He stood there silently, looking up towards the woods, where he had caught the last glance of her figure as it vanished from sight, and his imagination followed her on

her way, after she had passed beyond his vision; figuring her as she passed through the solemn woods and climbed the steep paths all alone, and going with her in spirit.

So he stood musing and dreaming for a half hour, and then he was roused from his reverie by the call of Maria, —

“Signor Conte, at your convenience, supper is ready.”

Prose, dull prose, after all the poetry. The voice of Maria jarred on him; the fact of supper jarred. It woke him from a dream that he willingly would have prolonged. He had no appetite. Eating seemed but a wretched material animal necessity, after the spiritual manna of dreams upon which his thoughts had been feeding. He still lingered, but the spell was broken, and then Maria’s voice was heard again, —

“Signor, with permission, the *frittata* is growing cold.”

CHAPTER V.

FIAMMETTA, after saying her last *addio*, pursued her way lightly through the trees, leaping the watercourses and climbing the hills; her mind and thoughts stirred by a strange agitated sense, which she could not account for. Few words had been spoken between her and Marco, only a few glances had passed between them; but they had left a sudden and strange influence on her, of gladness, of excitement, and of doubt. Long as the way was, it seemed short to her. Through the shadowy dark of the firs, over the open spaces where the yellow gorse glowed, she rapidly moved, noticing nothing, and walking as in a dream — the face of Marco constantly before her, the voice of Marco ringing in her ears. Nothing else did she hear or see; her mind, as it were, listening, her spirit magnetized. She could not account for this. Something had happened, so new, so strange, so sweet; and yet what it was she could not tell. Some-

thing had happened. What? and as she asked herself this question, she smiled, took a quicker step, and then sighed and said aloud, "Nonsense. What is he to me? What am I to him?"

Never had she known anything like this before. Her heart was virgin, her spirits untamed. The flatteries of all the men she had ever met had been to her but as the idle wind that blows upon dead leaves. They had stirred no pulse in her veins, love she had laughed at, nothing had ever wakened a response in her heart. She was to all their advances as hard as the granite rock. But now a breath passed over her, which was as it were nothing, and yet it had stirred her spirit to its depths, and created a sudden tumult in her thoughts which she could neither understand nor explain. It was as when a warm wind of spring dissolves the rigid surface of ice which had long locked up and frozen the genial current of some placid stream, and where was once stillness and silence is now the wild turbulent hurry of an impetuous torrent, overflowing its banks, and sweeping it knows not where. As yet the ice in her nature was not melted, the course of her thoughts not impetuous;

but the sense of a change had come, and the prophetic feeling of something, she knew not what, yet to come.

There was apparently no sufficient cause for this change ; but a change there was, and she felt it without acknowledging it, and yielded to it simply. Her life had been in the fields and moors and by the streams, — a child of nature, fed by its genial influence, a playmate of the seasons, loving all natural things, troubled by no self-introspections, philosophical questionings, and worldly ambitions, — she had lived her life from day to day, as the flowers live, as the trees live, as any wild animal lives. Her strong affections had never been roused and concentrated on any one person or thing, but scattered on every side, on all forms of beauty and grace, wherever she met them. Now she was vibrating to a touch unknown before, which brought from her spirit a thrill of a strange new music, to which she listened with surprise, and with a sense of restless pleasure.

The five miles she had to traverse seemed to her shorter than she had ever known them before, so busy were her thoughts. Thoughts is too strong a word, however, to express

what was passing in her mind. There was nothing definite in them ; they went to no end, and were animated by no distinct purpose or wish, save one, perhaps, to see Marco again. Rather were they like the moonlit misty haze which hid the depths of the valley below her and lent to it a sweet mysterious beauty ; or like the faint breathings of the air, that played in the leaves, with soft and tender sighings, now rising and now falling, as if the earth was whispering in its sleep.

It was already dark when she came in sight of the house where she lived. A light was shining in the windows, where she knew her grandmother and grandfather were waiting for her. When she arrived on the platform of green meadow before the house, she paused. She was sorry her walk was over, it had been so pleasant, never so pleasant before, and now she must go in, now it must end. Yet she stood still and did not move : she could not bring her mind to go in. All would be so different inside, — the grandmother would ask questions, and she did not wish to talk ; and her grandfather tell her she had stayed out too late, and they would make her eat something, and all the prose

would come again, — and out under the stars was so silent, so tender, so gentle, almost she wished she could lie down and sleep all night on the grass, so that she might not be obliged to talk, and so she stood for a time dreaming.

At last she heard the door open and saw her grandfather come and peer out into the night. "Ah, it is all over," she said to herself now, and she moved forwards to him.

"Ah, that is you at last, Fiammetta," he cried, "how late you are? Come in, child! Your Nonna has been wondering for the last half hour where you were, and whether something might not have happened to you."

"Am I late?" said Fiammetta.

"Very late — come in;" and she went in.

Her grandmother was sitting by the table knitting a pair of stockings. She looked up, and said, "How late you are, child; where have you been?"

"You know, Nonna, you sent me down to the Villa."

"Have you been nowhere else?"

"No; nowhere."

"And did you see the Signor Conte?"

"Yes, Nonna."

"And did you give him the strawberries?"

"Yes, Nonna."

"And what did he say?"

"He thanked you very much, and said you were very kind to think of him."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, Nonna. He was very sorry for your rheumatism."

"Is anything the matter with you, child? Why don't you tell me all about him? What else did he say? How did he look?"

"He said he would come up and see you."

"Sant' Antonio! will he, indeed. I shall be so happy to see him again. He always was a good kind youth — was n't he, Tonio?"

"Aye; he was," said the grandfather.

"Well, well; to think of his being grown up to be a man now. Let me see, it is how many years since I saw him? Eh, Tonio?"

"Some ten years, I think — that is, somewhere about ten years. Let me see — it was just about the time when we bought our donkey, and that must be some ten years ago."

"So long, so long; how the years go by! He was a handsome youth then. How does he look now, Fiammetta? Tell us all about

him. Has he grown up to be as handsome as he promised? Did he remember you?"

"Yes! No! I don't know," said Fiammetta.

"Bless me, Fiammetta, have you lost your tongue? Can't you tell me how he looked? Is he tall? Is he handsome? Did you like him?"

"Yes, he is tall, I think; he is handsome, I suppose."

"Well, if that is all you can say, it is pretty plain that he did not make much impression on you. I don't believe you even looked at him enough to tell me how he looked. But no matter, he is coming here, and I shall see and judge for myself."

Then the grandmother looked steadily at Fiammetta with a scrutinizing glance, and said, "Is anything the matter with you, child?"

"No, nothing, Nonna."

"What makes you look so, then?"

"I don't know, Nonna; nothing is the matter with me."

"I am afraid you have walked too far and too fast. You look feverish. Did anything happen to you on the road or down at the Villa?"

"No, Nonna; not that I know."

"Well, go to bed; that is the best thing for you, and perhaps to-morrow you will be able to find your tongue and tell us something more."

Glad to get away, Fiammetta took her light and left the room after saying good-night. Yes; she was glad to be alone again, and to have no questions asked, and to be cross-examined no further. How could she answer such questions? How could she tell what he looked like? How could she say whether she liked him, and what was the matter with her? She did not know herself. Perhaps it was a fever, who could tell? Perhaps in the morning, when she had slept, she should wake up and find everything different from what it was now, and like what it used to be? Perhaps, and then again, perhaps he had cast a spell upon her? There is no doubt, she thought, that some persons can cast spells on persons and cattle and sheep, and then what is to be done? "But I don't care," she said, as she got into bed and blew out her light; "I don't care if he has; no, I don't care if he has."

CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning, when Marco arose, a strong desire seized him to go to work again. He had been so long idle, mooning about and doing nothing, that he began to weary of it — art again claimed him. “At this rate,” he said, “I shall do nothing all summer, and I will take my sketch-book to-day and see if I can find anything that will really make a picture. After all, laziness begins to pall at last, and I have had enough of it.”

So he took his sketch-book, and wandered out into the woods, almost without any intention to go to any place — at least so he thought; yet almost, perhaps not quite, unconsciously his steps took the direction of the Casetta, as it was called, where Antonio and Gigia lived.

As he walked along, and sometimes paused and threw himself on the grass, the image of Fiammetta pursued him. He could not get her out of his thoughts. Her beauty, her wild grace, as of some uncultivated

flower, haunted him. "What eyes! what eyes!" he said to himself. "They fairly magnetized me. And what a figure! There is something in the child that affects me more than I like to own to myself. How she looked at me! Who could have been her father? There is evidently in her veins the blood of some noble race — everything shows it. It is not mere peasant blood — no, no! — but some high graft of civilization on a sturdy wild peasant stock. That must be it. There is a sort of fatality about her. What a smile! Poor Tonia! that was a sad story enough, — but all that passion of hers, all that strength that comes from suffering, must have passed into this poor child's soul, though she knows it not."

Thus wandering along, and communing with himself — despite himself thinking constantly of Fiammetta — he at last came to an opening of the woods, and down on the side of the hill saw the old farmhouse of the Casetta, where Gigia and Antonio lived.

Here he paused, and reasoned with himself. "I should better not go in," he thought. "It will be better for me and Fiammetta that I should not go there. For somehow or other I seem to feel that — that

— well — that I should better not go. But why not? I promised Fiammetta to go and call upon old Gigia, and one ought to keep one's promises; and, besides, I know the poor old woman will be glad to see me, and I ought to thank her for the strawberries. She cannot come to me, and she will think it an honor (God bless the mark, what poor creatures we all are!) if I go to see her. But, I know not why, there is something within me tells me not to go — tells me it is a step on a shelving precipice. Yet why? Lead me not into temptation. Bah! Everything is a temptation in life that has any worth in it. All depends on what the temptation is. Should we confine ourselves to the fruit that is sour and bitter and unripe, because it does not tempt us? and is it wrong to take the ripe luscious fruit that does tempt us? Does God make beauty only to tempt us? That, I should think, was rather the devil's work. But here there is no temptation to wrong. It is simply a matter of courtesy to go and see the old woman; and if Fiammetta is there, is that my fault? And then, again, let me not lie to myself, I must see Fiammetta again. Why? She can live without seeing me, and of course

I can live without seeing her. Perhaps, if I see her again, the impression I received from her yesterday will be cancelled at once. It was the magic of the twilight and the surprise that lent her that peculiar grace and charm. In broad daylight all things wear a different aspect. Besides, I am curious to see if she again will look as she did last night. Here I am inventing obstacles that are mere shadows, and working up a mighty mystery out of nothing. I must be a little out of sorts. I to fall in love with a peasant girl! I! This is my foolish way of going on, and poetizing about mere common facts. The fact is, I must cure myself of it."

Having thus resolved, he went straight to the Casetta, and there he found Gigia alone. She overwhelmed him with thanks for his kindness in coming to see her, and told him how he had grown, and how well she remembered him when he was a boy — a bright little boy — only so high, you know, and now to think that he was such a piece of a man, and was a great painter, so she was told. "No! no! not like the old Count, though there is a little kind of something like him. But, oh dear! yes, so like the Countess of blessed memory, his mother — ah, a good,

good woman. You don't remember her, I suppose? Ah no, how could you? you were so small. Yes; do you really? you do remember her. Ah yes; you were five when she died, so you might remember her. I wondered how you looked, and I asked Fiammetta last night all about you; but I could get nothing out of her, she would not say anything. She was tired, I suppose. It was a long walk, not that it is a long walk for her, for she is gone sometimes the whole day. But I was afraid that she was a little feverish, she looked so. But no, this morning she seemed all right, and for a wonder she has stayed near the house all the morning. She must be here now, I think. Fiammetta! Fiammetta! where are you? Come here, — the Signor Conte is here."

No answer was made, and Gigia went and looked out of the door and called again, but all in vain.

"Ah, well," she said at last, "she's not here; she's gone away somewhere. Ah, here's Tonio. I say, Tonio, here's the Signor Conte."

So Tonio came in and shook hands, and was proud to see the Conte in his house, and asked the same questions that Gigia had,

and told about his farm and the cattle, and the weather, and all the stock subjects, and then Gigia said, —

“Tonio, when you came in I was just calling for Fiammetta. Have you seen her? She was here a little while ago. She would like, I am sure, to see the Signor Conte. Where is she now, I wonder?”

“Up at the *cascata*, I think it probable,” said Tonio. “It’s a favorite haunt of hers, and I think I heard her voice, singing, as I came down the hill. But who can tell where she is? she is as wild as a partridge, and I wonder sometimes,” he added with a laugh, “whether she will not fly off like them and never return.”

“Ah, Tonio, don’t say that,” cried Gigia. “*O Madonna mia!* I pray not. Ah, signor! signor! it was once our fate, and it broke our hearts. Her mother, you know.”

“Ah, yes! I know,” said Marco, sympathetically.

“But,” continued Gigia, “that is all over now, all but the wound that never quite heals; but I beg your pardon, I did not mean to bother you with our troubles. Every one has enough of his own, and the Lord preserve you from all evils of every kind!

But, *basta* ; yes, I dare say she is up at the *cascata*."

"And where is that?" asked Marco.

"Oh, up the valley there. You see those trees that shelve down on both sides to a deep defile. Well, there is a mountain stream which pours down there, and just above is a fall of water about a mile up, that we call the *cascata*. Fiammetta is pretty sure to be somewhere about there. I am sorry she is not at home. And will you, signor, have a glass of wine, or of milk, and a bit of cheese. Our cheese is pretty good, and the milk, if you like milk, I can truly recommend. Pray, let me bring you some."

Marco thanked her, and accepted her offer ; and she brought him a bowl of sweet milk, which he drank, saying, "Excellent, excellent. I never tasted better milk."

Then he lingered and chatted with them a while, in the hope that Fiammetta might return ; but he was disappointed, and after waiting a good half hour, he bade them good-by, saying, "Remember me to Fiammetta."

At first he turned his footsteps homeward ; but after going a little way he stopped, thought a few minutes, and altered his di-

rection towards the valley where Tonio told him the *cascata* lay. Silently he made his way along, sometimes hesitating and stopping, and then pursuing his path, as if he could not decisively make up his mind what to do. There was scarcely any definite road, only here and there were vestiges of paths, for the most part entirely overgrown with grass, and showing that but few persons had travelled over them. At last he found his way down a steep slope of firs, on whose carpet of brown needles his foot fell softly, and came upon a mountain torrent that was bubbling and foaming down its rocky bed, and finding its way through massive boulders, so old and huge that they seemed as if they had been flung there by the Titans of old in some desperate contest. The beauty of the place arrested him. High overhead towered on either slope a magnificent growth of beeches, some throwing out their branches over the stream as if in protection, and weaving a tessellated roof of quivering leaves against the sky. Looking up the gorge into the distance, there was a deep dell of green, illuminated by the sun, and over-canopied by a mass of delicate foliage, through which the light, piercing here and there, gleamed on

the smooth trunks of the beeches and the shadows of the leaves as they wavered to and fro, and the delicate breeze played fitfully across them. The boulders were crusted and diapered over with cushions of variegated mosses, and against them sunlit ferns spread out their traceries and printed their fingered shadows. Adown the shelving rocks on either side clung and trailed in lush confusion a tangled growth of brambles, eglantine, and ivy, whose groping sprays, stretching out for support, wavered to and fro in the light breeze. The banks were enamelled with purple, blue, and golden wild-flowers, that glowed amid the fine spiring grasses and broken brown earth; and groups of bushes fringed here and there the torrent. All was silent; no noise disturbed the serenity of the place, where only was heard the whisper of the trees and the gurgle of the stream as it sang its low perpetual song over the stones. Here and there the clear waters rounded into brown pools with pebbled bottoms, over which skated groups of water-flies in rapid circles, and in whose depths were mirrored the overhanging trees and the still blue sky beyond. Slender dragon-flies poised gleaming over the water, darting to

and fro in the sunshine on their glassy irised wings; and now and then some little bird fluttered through or rested to drink at the clear basins, and piped a little song and then vanished. The world and all its vanities seemed a thousand miles away, and as if it never existed.

Tired and hot, Marco here rested, took off his hat to feel the cool wind on his brow, sat down on one of the mossy stones, and gave himself up to reverie. Here was peace. The murmurous sounds lulled him, and a dreamy sense of calm came over him as he surrendered himself up to the influence of the place, not struggling against Nature, but yielding to her will and gentle sway, and content for the time to live, even as the trees and flowers.

Suddenly he heard at a short distance up the valley, a sweet argentine voice singing, as it were, to the accompaniment of the gurgling stream. It came low and faint to his ear, and he could not catch the words, but the air was one of those natural melodies that are so common in Italy — a sweet, and yet somewhat melancholy strain, with prolongations of each final note as the line or verse closed, and pauses, and then the next

line taken up and sung. He listened enchanted. Something there was in it so refined, so in harmony with the scene, that it seemed like the voice of Nature singing to itself, as if the spirit of the brook had taken voice and was singing to itself. Who could it be? What could it be? he asked himself, and half held his breath, fearing it would come to an end.

And so, after a few minutes, it did ; and the butterflies wavered about, and the insects hummed, and the brook gurgled, and the trees rustled, but the voice and the singing ceased.

Curious to know whence the song came, he slowly advanced up the valley, keeping to the watercourse, stepping from stone to stone across it, pausing at intervals, peering forward, and moving as noiselessly as he could. At last he came to a sudden turn of the brook, and through the trees saw the figure of a girl sitting on one of the boulders. It was Fiammetta. Hidden by the trees, he was invisible to her, and he stopped and gazed at her as she sat in the half light, dappled with the shadows of the trees, half turned away from him, and utterly unconscious of the presence of any human being.

She had taken off her shoes and stockings, and one foot was dipped into the pool of brown water beneath, into which she was looking. Her head was uncovered, her upper dress had been loosened, and exposed her shoulders and bosom, over which fell, in long, black, curling masses, her rich and beautiful hair. Apparently she had been bathing, or, perhaps, secure of her privacy, and heated by exercise, she had half undressed herself to enjoy the coolness of the breeze and of the water ; and now, when Marco first caught sight of her, she was looking down into the water, lost in reverie, and, as it were, communing with herself.

Marco stood transfixed, and gazed at her for a time in silence and surprise, taking in the whole scene, — the secluded beauty of the place, the grace and perfectness of the figure, — as if in fear that he should lose this exquisite picture, for picture it was to him. For a moment the artist subdued the man. Imagination drove out all feeling of personality. She was not Fiammetta ; he was not Marco, and he murmured to himself, “ How beautiful ! It is my naiad, that I dreamed of, but never hoped to see. This is the picture I must paint. Here is my summer’s work.”

Silently he gazed, not moving, but drinking in the whole scene ; striving to satiate the thirst of his eyes and imagination ; fearing to lose anything, and impressing as well as he could on his memory all its effect and all its detail. He stood there entranced, as Actæon might have stood when he suddenly surprised Artemis and her nymph. But Actæon was only the hunter and the man ; Marco, for the moment, was only the artist.

As he bent forward, a dead branch cracked under his foot. Fiammetta heard it, and instantly looked up, her large dark eyes searching the wood. Marco then advanced, and cried, " Fiammetta, is that you ? "

She sprang to her feet in an instant ; drew her dress hurriedly together, and fixed her steady eyes on him a moment in alarm, and then she cried, " Oh, Signor Conte ! "

There was no bashfulness, no sense of being surprised, no indication of offended modesty in her reception of him. Why should there be ? She was perfectly innocent, and the mere fact that her arms, bosom, and legs were nude, did not carry with it to her mind any idea of impropriety. The legs and arms of half the girls that toiled over the hills were bare as hers were then. *That* meant

nothing, and never had meant anything to her mind, or to the mind of any of the peasants with whom she lived. All such ideas are merely the result of habit and convention.

Nor for a moment did Marco attach any significance to this. He was an artist, and he knew how little nudity had to do with modesty. All that impressed him was her singular beauty ; her correspondence to the idea he had conceived of a naiad ; her perfection as a model for the picture he desired to paint.

Nor was she surprised to see him. All the long morning he had been in her thoughts ; and remembering that he had promised to visit her grandmother, she had lingered, contrary to her custom, near the house, lest if he should take a fancy to come that day, she might miss seeing him. But as noon came on and he did not make his appearance, she gave up all hope of his coming, and betook herself to this spot, which was one of her favorite haunts during the summer. There she had been for an hour, listening to the music of the woods, and lost in reverie ; one idea despite herself hunting persistently through her thoughts, and returning pertinaciously, however she strove to drive it

away. So filled was her mind with his image, that when she looked up and beheld him standing before her, it scarcely startled her.

"And what are you doing here, Fiammetta?" at last he said.

"Nothing, Signor Conte; only dreaming."

"Of what were you dreaming? Of whom, Fiammetta?"

Then a rosy blush rushed into her cheeks, and she was silent.

"Then you won't tell me what you were thinking of. It is a secret, I suppose."

"No, signor," she answered. "It is not a secret, and it is nothing wrong; but it is not worth telling. I cannot tell you. Why should you care to know?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Marco. "I did not mean anything. I did not wish to force your confidence. Only you seemed so abstracted that I was curious, impertinently perhaps, to know what so occupied your thoughts."

"I should rather not tell you," she said. "You would not understand."

"Certainly; don't tell me. Let me tell you rather what I was thinking of when I saw you here. But no matter; perhaps you would not understand."

She looked at him with a peculiar expression, as the thought passed suddenly across her that as she had been thinking of him, so perhaps he had been thinking of her; and she felt a certain thrill at the thought. But what could he have been thinking of her? Then she said, —

“Did you know I was here, signor?”

“No,” he answered. “No; that is, not exactly. I have been to call on your grandmother. I promised, you know, to go and see her.”

“Yes, signor.”

“And you were not at home, you know, and I asked how you were, and where you were, as I did not see you; and she told me you were up here in this direction — at the *cascata*, as she called the place. So I strolled along through the woods to see what sort of a place it was that you selected as your favorite haunt; and, Fiammetta — I may call you Fiammetta, may I not?”

She looked at him with surprise. “Why not? that is my name.”

“But you know that in the city we don’t call young ladies of your age by their first name, unless we are old friends.”

“Don’t you?” said she. “How odd!

But I am not a young lady, and so it is all different."

"And as I was saying," he went on, "I wandered in this direction in the hope that I might see you."

"You wished to see me, signor. Why?"

"Ah! that is difficult to explain; but I did wish to see you, and I am very glad I came. Yes; very glad indeed."

"So am I," she said, simply; "that is, if you are. I did not think you would wish to see me again."

"Now it is my turn to ask you why. Why should not I wish to see you?"

"I don't know why you should, signor. It is very kind of you to say so."

"Very kind of me to say so? Ah! I don't see that. But I mean what I say. I was afraid you would have too long a walk last night and be tired; and I wished to assure myself that nothing had happened to you. The woods are so lonely at night, and there are dangers sometimes to a handsome girl like you, all unprotected. Your grandmother ought not to allow you to be out so late all alone."

"Oh, I am not afraid, signor. Nobody would harm me."

"I don't know that. You must promise me not to do this any more."

"Why should you care, signor?"

"Well, I do care. Will you make me this promise?"

"I will do anything you ask me to do;" and then she paused, and added — "no matter what it is."

"That is having a very great confidence in me."

"*Si*, signor."

"Why should you have any confidence in me? You don't know me. You don't know what I might ask you to do. I might ask you to do something very wrong."

"No, signor; you never would."

"How do you know?"

"I trust you. I don't know how I know; but I look in your face, and I know. You will never tell me to do anything wrong. You will always be good to me. I see it — I see it as I see that tree, and know it is a tree. I do not need to think about it. When one sees a thing, one sees it — that is all. I shall never more believe in anybody or anything, if I am deceived in this."

"My dear Fiammetta!" he said, for he was touched by this utter confidence; "you

are right. You may trust me. I will never ask you to do anything that is wrong. I promise you that."

He had seated himself on the grass at her feet, and she had resumed her place on the boulder. As he said these last words he looked up in her face, and she looked down at him. There was something singularly winning in this child's simplicity, he thought. She was seventeen. She was still a child in many things, and her eyes seemed filled with deep still radiance, and were suffused by a tearlike gleam as she looked at him. A thousand unspoken vague presentiments and feelings and impulses stirred in him, and a tender strange interest drew him to her. Something had grown up between them suddenly; without speech, or hidden within their speech, and made manifest only by tones and looks, and that subtle influence of one soul over another which we call magnetism.

He said nothing; but leaning over, bent down his eyes and plucked the spires of grass, and she looked vaguely into the water. It was only a moment's silence, but it might have been an hour for all she knew; and when he again spoke, it was as

if she had been far, far away on a vague journey, and now was recalled home.

"Fiammetta," he said, "I have a favor to ask of you. Will you grant it?"

"I will if I can, signor, and gladly. What is it?"

"I want you to be my model — my naiad."

"What is that, signor?" she said; and she trembled, not knowing what he meant.

"A naiad," he answered, "is the protecting spirit of the stream, the torrent, the brook. They do not exist except in fable; but they none the less live in the heart of all who love nature, as you do."

"Oh yes, signor. I love nature; I love everything in nature — the birds, the flowers, the insects, the trees, the brooks. Ah, yes! most of all I love the brooks. They talk to me forever; they tell me I know not what; and I listen and listen for hours to them, and wonder what they are saying, that is so fine, so far, so sweet. Tell me more about these spirits. Are they saints?"

"No, not what we mean by saints. The ancient people who used to live here and in Greece, long, long centuries ago, loved and worshipped nature, and they imagined that

there were spirits and gentle creatures who guarded and protected the trees and the mountains and the brooks. They were beautiful and immortal, and were sometimes seen by mortals. The guardians of the mountains were called oreads, and those of the trees dryads, and those of the brooks naiads."

"I think these old people were right. I sometimes think I see such creatures — such spirits — and I know I hear them at times in the mountains while I am roaming alone — in the trees when they are talking with the winds — in the brooks, too. Ah, yes! in the brooks, certainly. Listen to this now, signor, and tell me what it says. Something it says. And then, again, I hear them shriek when the great trees are struck by the axe. Ah! it sounds so cruel that ring of the axe; and when with a crash they fall to the earth, that is always horrible to me. I pray them to save the trees; but they laugh at me. Perhaps they are right; but it hurts me to hear a tree fall."

"Those that you hear shrieking when the trees fall are the dryads. But what I want you to be is a naiad, the spirit of the brook — of this very brook."

"I don't know exactly what you want me to do; but I will do it if I can."

"I will tell you. A year ago I made a sketch of a naiad sitting on a mossy boulder over a torrent, that foamed along as this does. It was the spirit that protected the torrent; and it sat there, dreaming and gazing into just such a brown, shallow, pebbly mirror of water as this. It was only a sketch, but it pleased one of my dearest friends; and when I was coming away from Rome he said, 'Take that sketch with you, and paint it, or something like it, this summer from nature. There you will find your inspiration, and your mountain torrents will give you your facts. What you will not find, I am afraid, is your naiad. That, indeed, will be difficult; but seek for her.' Well, I promised, and came away, and since then I have not thought of it until to-day — until an hour ago — I came up the valley in search of you, as I told you, but I found you not; and at last, tired and hot, I sat down on one of the rocks below, just out of sight, never imagining that you were near me. As I was sitting there, I heard your voice singing up the defile, and I rose and came forward; and I saw you sitting here,

half in sun and half in shade, with the brook beneath you, and the trees above you; and I cried out to myself, with a pang of pleasure, 'Ah! there is my naiad. Fiammetta shall be my naiad, and this shall be the stream which she presides over and protects.' Now, Fiammetta, will you be my naiad? Will you be my model, and let me paint this beautiful place, and you sitting on the rocks and guarding it?"

"Yes," she said; "but I must sit there then and let you paint me. Will it take a long time?"

"Yes. I am afraid it will, and I shall have to ask you to come here a good many mornings. Will it bore you very much? I will do it as fast as I can, and I shall count it a very great favor."

"Oh, signor; is that all? Ah, that will never bore me. No, no! But I am afraid I am not fit to serve you as a model."

"Ah well; leave that to me. I am satisfied. I want nothing different from you — if I can only make you as you are."

"And then I shall be with you all the mornings — every morning?"

"Yes; all the mornings, if you will."

"Oh yes; I will, certainly."

"Tell your grandmother I want you, and tell her all about it. I do not think she will object. And as for all the time you lose in sitting to me, I will make that all right to her."

"Signor!"

"Certainly. I have no right to take up your time."

"If you say that again, signor, I will not come at all!" And she stood up, and a fire flashed out of her eyes. Then she turned away, and covered her face with her hands.

"Fiammetta, Fiammetta *mia!*" said Marco, "have I offended you?"

"I did not think you could say that," she answered. "I will not be bought by anybody. I will come for you if you wish for me, freely, without recompense, or I will not come at all. Nothing, nothing on earth shall induce me to take money for it. Oh, signor, signor, how you have mortified me!" and she burst into a passion of tears.

Marco was quite taken aback. He came forward to her, took her hands in his, looked in her face, and said, "I am sorry, Fiammetta; I did not mean to offend you. Pray do not cry. Forgive me! I will take you freely, as you offer yourself, and thank you

from the bottom of my soul. Fiammetta, look at me, and say you forgive me."

She smiled at him through her tears. The brief thunderstorm went by, and the sun shone out over her face.

"There is nothing to forgive, signor. You did not mean to hurt me; but you did hurt me. Let us think no more about it. It is past. When shall I come to you?"

"I will begin to-morrow, if you like."

"And at what hour?"

"Let me see — it is now six o'clock. The shadows are getting too long and deep in this valley. Let us say two o'clock, and then I shall have the light I had when I first saw you, and it will give me time to draw in the general outline and mass. I shall perhaps come earlier, so as to begin and not to trouble you so long."

"I told you it was no trouble, signor. I always speak the truth. Whatever else I am, I am sincere. I do not like lies."

"Ah, you don't know yet what a bore it is to sit for one's picture."

"No, signor; but I don't think it will be to me — to you it may be."

"Certainly not to me," said Marco, with a laugh. "Most certainly not to me, as long as you are my model."

So it was agreed, and as the sun was westering, and Marco had a long walk before him, he said good-by.

"Do you know your shortest way?" she asked.

"Pretty well. I think I can find it."

"I will go with you, and show you — a little way at least — if you have no objection. I can show you a short cut."

"Thank you. You are very kind. It is on your way home, is it not?"

"Part of the way it is."

So they walked along together for a little distance, and said little, both occupied with their own thoughts. At last Fiammetta said, — "I have been thinking, signor, that you will have things to bring over to-morrow to work with, a bag, perhaps, that it will trouble you to carry. Shall I come over and carry them for you?"

"Good gracious! Fiammetta, what are you thinking of? Do you suppose I would let you carry my things for me?"

"I am very strong, signor, though perhaps you do not think so. I can carry them all on my head."

"My dear Fiammetta, I would not have you do it for the world. No! no! no! and

a thousand times no! I should be ashamed to do such a thing; all the same I thank you for your kind thought. I will bring them all over on the donkey. That will be best."

"As you will, signor," said she, humbly.

"You know I thank you all the same."

"Yes, signor; but I should have liked to carry them for you."

At a turning of the valley Fiammetta pointed out to Marco his way. And they shook hands.

"We are friends. You have forgiven me really?" said he.

She nodded her head and smiled, and they parted.

"A strange girl," he said to himself, as he walked along; "so simple, so sensitive, so fiery, so gentle. I wonder what Carlo would say to all this?"

She walked slowly home, and said nothing to herself. What was there to say? She did not yet quite know what it all meant; but she was none the less aware that the twilight air was different, and that all the world had changed. Faithful to her word, she told her grandmother all that had occurred, and her grandmother made no objection to her sitting to Marco as his model.

"But you must dress yourself differently, child," she said, "and tie up your hair neatly, and put on your best frock and shoes. It will never do to go looking as you do now."

"He did not say so," said Fiammetta. "No, Nonna, I shall wear the same old things, until he tells me to change them. He knows what he wants, and we do not."

"Very well," said her grandmother, "do as you think best for to-morrow; but you know you do look like a fright in that old dress."

"He did not say so," she repeated.

"Of course he did n't. He did not like to. But do you ask him to-morrow."

"Yes; I will do that," she said.

CHAPTER VII.

THE next morning Marco busied himself in arranging for his picture. He unrolled his canvas and fastened it on its stretcher, looked carefully over all his colors and brushes, and saw that all was in order. Then he took from his portfolio the sketch, and examined it, and pondered it long. "It is curious," he thought; "this sketch seems to prefigure the very spot and the very scene of yesterday, and even the figure of the naiad is not unlike that of Fiammetta. Almost it seems as if it were, as they say, a sort of second-sight, or foresight, such as one sometimes has in dreams. I suppose Fate willed that I should paint this picture. After all, how little, with all our pretensions, we order the events of our life. A secret power seems to drive us along the predestined path we are to tread, and whether we will or not we must take it. A good genius or a bad genius leads us where we are to go; and since we cannot refuse its

leading, how are we responsible? It is a comfortable philosophy, at all events, to believe this. How can we prearrange the course our life is to take? Willy, nilly, we go as we are directed."

Then he sat and thought of Fiammetta — not so much of her as she really was, but as he intended her to be in his picture; how he should pose her, what her dress should be — "Well, we will leave that to chance," he thought, "or what we call chance. I will let her alone — to take what attitude she chooses. I have a feeling that she and Nature will arrange all that for me better than I can arrange it for myself."

"Let me see whether I have everything — easel, charcoal, oil, turpentine, canvas, brushes, palette-knife, pocket-knife, rags. Stop, let me see. I had better find another rag. This is too much soiled." So saying, he went to his drawer to see if he could find any; and turning its contents over, he came upon a little box, which he opened. "Corals!" he exclaimed, "that is just the thing. Now, see what chance does. I should never have thought of this. I will put it on her neck; and she shall have it to keep, after she has ceased to be my naiad, for remembrance."

Having arranged everything, he called Pietro and told him he was going out to paint a picture up near the Casetta, "and as I cannot carry all these things myself," he said, "I must have the donkey; so get him ready at once." So Pietro put the great heavy saddle on the donkey, and all the things were piled upon it and safely secured.

"Shall I go with you?" said Pietro.

"No; I shall manage it very well alone."

And off he set. The way was long, the day was hot, and what with stoppages to breathe and cool himself, it was a good hour and a half before he arrived. But there was Fiammetta waiting for him.

"Ah, you are here before me," he cried.

"I have been here an hour, signor."

"Bah, how hot I am!" he exclaimed, as he flung himself down on the grass. "It's a long pull, Fiammetta."

"Lie down and rest," said she, "and I will look after the donkey and take off all the things. Leave all that to me, signor."

"No, no! I will do it myself in a few minutes; there is no hurry."

"No, signor; you must let me do it. I am used to it. Please let me do it."

He consented, and lay on the grass and watched her as she moved about, and thought how deftly she did it all, and how graceful she was. Every now and then she turned to him and said, "Is that right?" and smiled. And he smiled back and said, "All right." It was a pleasure to them both—to him to be waited on and cared for; to her to wait upon him. It seemed to bring them nearer together, and to be somehow or other the most natural thing in the world.

"And the donkey," she said, after she had unloaded him. "I think *we* will tie him up in the woods; he will find enough to browse on there."

We will tie him up—we, not I. That little word seemed to make them one.

"Yes; that will be best," said he.

She led him away, was gone for a few minutes, and then returned.

"Do you know," said he, "it is very pleasant to be waited upon by you, Fiammetta?"

"It is so little, signor, that I can do."

"I don't know whether it is little or much, but it is very pleasant. I should like to be here all day and look at you moving about me. I've a great mind to do nothing else,

but let you do all there is to do. It is so delightful to be lazy and to have one's work done for one, when it is done so prettily and kindly. You shall take the canvas and the brushes and paint for me."

"Ah! I think so," she said. And she laughed a merry and musical laugh, and seemed much amused at the idea. "I wish I could."

"Suppose you should try."

"I try? Nonsense, signor; you are laughing at me."

"No; I am laughing with you. It is delightful, perfectly delightful here. I don't think we should better do any work; it seems a foolish thing to work. The trees do not work; the flowers do not work. Man is the only creature that works; all other things and creatures play."

"The bees and the ants, signor."

"Oh yes; and I hate them for it. Why do they keep up such an everlasting working, setting such a bad example to us all? I think the Evil One invented work; and his children are the bees and the ants and the flies, though these last do not work; they are only made to irritate and provoke us, little black messengers of Satan, I think.

Let us do no work to-day ; let us sit and talk."

"As you please, signor. I am satisfied, if you are."

"Well, I am thoroughly satisfied. You were not born for work, Fiammetta. You were made to be beautiful and graceful, and to live like the flowers, and to be happy, and to be without care."

"Ah! I don't think that, signor. Nonna don't think so, at all events." And she laughed gayly.

"Ah, but your Nonna does not know you as well as I do!"

"Not as well as you do? Why, you have only seen me twice, and Nonna has known me all my life."

"That makes no difference. We do not rightly see persons or things when they are too near us ; and then your Nonna sees you through such different spectacles. Have you ever seen what is called a Claude glass?"

"No, signor ; what is it?"

"It is a glass with various colored discs, that all open and shut as one chooses. Here is one. Now look at the landscape through this slide" (and he opened one). "Do you see? It is all purple, is it not? And now

through this, it is all yellow and golden; and now through this, it is all obscured and dark."

"So it is, signor; how strange! Everything changes as I change the glasses; everything is the same, but so different. I suppose Nonna sees me through the dark glass, you would say."

"Yes, and I see you through the yellow one; and I see you more clearly, and there is about you a golden haze and glory."

"So there is about you, signor. When I look at you through this glass your hair is all gold, and you look as St. John looks in the picture over the altar in the church."

"Well, Fiammetta, always look at me through that glass if you can, and see me not as I am, but as I ought to be. Ah, well, all things are as they seem, and not as they are, and we need these Claude glasses in life."

"Not those who love, signor; not the poets, to them life is always beautiful — always glorious. They do not see things as others do."

"Sometimes they see them all in mourning — sad, obscure, dismal."

"Ah! that is when death and sorrow and despair blacken everything."

"Well, we won't let any glass blacken life for us to-day, Fiammetta. Let us enjoy what we have. Nature is very kind, and there is beauty everywhere if we choose to see it, so let us choose to see it."

"We cannot always — however we choose," said Fiammetta. "We are sometimes powerless and helpless, and we have to cry, for all we wish for slips away from us, and everything comes wrong to us, and we are afraid sometimes to enjoy even what we have, and we do not know how long even what we own will be ours to keep, and then we do not always dare to be as happy as we are. There is always a fear in our happiness; it may be a temptation, it may be a wrong; and then when we feel sure, sometimes our light suddenly goes out and leaves us in the dark, and we go stumbling about and hurt ourselves, and then everything seems the worse and the darker, because of the light that we had."

Marco looked at her with surprise as she said this, and did not reply. There was a depth of feeling in this utterance of hers that silenced him. He had opened a humble door, and had a glimpse into a world of emotions unsuspected by him. His hand

had carelessly swept the strings of what seemed but a humble, unresponsive instrument, and he was startled by the sweet, pathetic vibration that followed. She had never spoken so long a sentence before. As yet, in all her intercourse with him, her spirit had only, as it were, hopped from branch to branch; now suddenly it had taken wing, and lifted to a longer flight into the sky.

After a pause Fiammetta continued, — “Ah, signor, to such as you life always smiles. If you turn to the right or to the left it is sunlight. You can do as you please, and go where you please, and live as you please. When you are weary of the mountains and the trees and the solitudes, as you will be soon, you can go away to the city, to the sea — anywhere, everywhere, all the world is before you — you are free. I am here like a caged bird; no matter what I wish, no matter what I long for, here I am, and here I must stay, whether I sing my song gayly or pine and fret against the bars.”

“But you are happy, Fiammetta, are you not, to live this life? You would not exchange it for another, would you?”

“I do not know what I want, I know so

little, I have seen so little. Yes, I have always been happy here. If it could all be always as it is now ; if I was sure of myself or of anything. But this is silly. Yes, signor, I am happy now. How could any one help being happy such a day as this ? Happiness, I suppose, is in ourselves, not in the accidents of life and fortune, not in where we are, but in what we are. Sometimes I am happy, I know not why ; sometimes I am unhappy, I know not why. Now I am happy. Everybody is kind to me, and even you are kind, who have no reason to be."

"On the contrary, 't is you that are kind to me."

"Ah ! that of course. How could I help that ? That is different."

"You might, you know, if you chose. When I whistled you might say, 'I hear you, but I won't come.' But you see you have kindly offered to do me a great favor. Some girls would have refused."

"It seems to me that nobody, like me, could refuse."

"No ! nobody like you, perhaps ; but very few are like you, in any way."

"I suppose I am odd ; at least Nonna tells me so constantly. But she does not un-

derstand me, and we think so differently about everything. But that is very natural. She wishes me to — but this cannot interest you, signor. I beg your pardon. I did not mean to say all this. I don't know why I did."

"You knew I should sympathize with you; that is the reason."

"I suppose it is."

And again there was a silence, and Marco shut his eyes and fell to dreaming, and she sat still and looked into the sky.

"Hark!" said Marco suddenly, and lifting up his hand, "there is the nightingale." And they listened, as a gush of low liquid notes came from the woods.

"He is a late lover," said Marco, as the song ceased. "I thought all the nightingales had told their love-tale before now, and become demure and silent like married men. I have not heard one before for several days."

"Yes," she said; "the cuckoo has gone, and only now and then we shall hear the nightingale now; but the chaffinch has come, and he will stay with us all summer, and the woods never want for music here. There is the *fringuello*."

“Ah!” he said; “but there is nothing like the nightingale. None sing the strong, passionate thrilling note of love that he pours forth to the world. Others warble their love; but his full soul is prodigally lavished in his strain, without reserve or stint. Hark! there he is again. Who could resist such love-making as that?”

“Ah, signor, he only sings his love while he is young, and when the spring is here, and the early summer, and he sings it all out then, and has nothing more to say. But the *fringuello* sings better and better as he grows older. His love lasts, and when he is old he sings his best. There are very few men and women who do that. And more, signor, if you catch the *fringuello*, and put out his eyes, and prison him in a cage, he sings perhaps then better than ever; and cruel people do this, and they make out of his pain and privation their pleasure. It makes my heart sick to think of it, and they are so pretty too, the *fringuelli*, and they turn all their pain and sorrow into song.”

“Like the poets, Fiammetta. One of them says, ‘And learn in suffering what they teach in song.’ You are fond of birds, Fiammetta, so I am told.”

“Who told you?”

“Maria; and she says that you can charm them. Do it now, won’t you, for me?”

“Please, some other time, signor. I must be in the mood, and I am not now.”

“Oh, when you will, then. You are fond of birds?”

“I am fond of all animals. They are faithful; they return your kindness; they do not quarrel with you, even when you wrong them, and we are always doing them wrong; and besides they are grateful and patient and forgiving; and there is something in their eyes, signor, that is in no human eyes. How shall I say it? appealing, pathetic — more than that — sympathetic. They are always a puzzle to me. I cannot understand them. They seem always wishing to tell me something.”

Fiammetta had risen as she was speaking, and began to walk to and fro, and Marco lay watching her. After a moment she sprang to the centre of the torrent, and seated herself on one of the great boulders, in an attitude so free, so naive, so graceful and natural, that Marco cried out to her, “Don’t move, Fiammetta! Stay just as you are. Don’t move!”

"No, signor ; I will not."

He sprang to his feet, and made a hasty sketch of her precisely as she was. And she sat perfectly still and silent, as if she feared to move. He, too, was so busy that he did not speak ; and a half hour flew by to him as if it were a minute. Then, suddenly, it came over him that he was keeping her too long fixed in one attitude, and he said, —

"I am afraid I have tired you. Move now."

"I can sit still longer if you wish," she said, though she was really rigid with keeping motionless for such a length of time.

"No, no ! Move now ; I have done all that is necessary. Would you like to see it ?"

"May I ?"

"Certainly ; it is nothing yet, but it will do me a good service."

She came over to him and looked at the sketch. "Oh, that is beautiful !" she said. "Too beautiful for me. I only wish I looked like that !"

"But you do ; only this does not do you justice. This is only a sketch. Wait till I have painted you really."

"Does it look like me to you?"

"Yes, a little; only it does not do you justice, as I told you. You know you are a great deal more beautiful than that."

"Oh, no, no! but I am glad I look anything like that to you."

"To me! You do to everybody."

"I don't care for everybody. I only care for what persons whom I like think."

"Then you do like me? Thank you, Fiammetta. I think we shall get on together very well."

She turned very red, and said nothing. He examined his sketch, and his mind was far off from her personally. He was thinking how this figure would come into his picture and compare with the rest of the scene; and he glanced from it to the brook and the rocks and the trees, utterly lost to her. Then he said to himself, "Yes; I think that will do," and laid it down, and took out his watch.

"*Per Bacco!* how the time goes!" he cried; "I had no idea it was so late. If I am to do anything to-day, I must begin at once." And he busied himself in selecting the exact point of view he should take.

"What do you think, Fiammetta?" he

said. "Does it look best from this point? Look! come here—just where I am. There, what do you say? or here?—perhaps this is the best. The trees come in better from here, don't they? what do you think?"

"How should I know?" said she; but delighted that he should ask her opinion. "Both seem right to me."

"But what do you think is best? I incline to think this is."

"So do I, signor." She would have said the same had he chosen the other view. But whatever he thought, she thought.

"Well, then, we will choose this. Come, Fiammetta, help me place the easel just here. Yes; that is right. Now for the box of colors," and he settled himself down to sketch in the place on the canvas in outline.

"Shall I go and sit there again?" she asked.

"No; that is not necessary yet. Amuse yourself; I won't bore you any longer now."

"May I look at you while you work?"

"Certainly. We will make an artist of you, Fiammetta. You never tried to paint, did you?"

"Who? I? Oh, signor! I—never."

"Well, everybody has to begin. So you will see how it is done : an outline in charcoal, see, first ; and then we will use the colors. The outline first, so as to see that all the parts come in to the canvas."

She stood at his side and watched him attentively, and a great feeling of content came over her. She said very little, only now and then answering his casual questions ; but happy at being near him, and happy in the kind of confidence he showed her. It seemed all so natural and simple, and yet so new and unlike what she had experienced before. She felt that he was kind to her, and kind in a way that others were not ; but she did not analyze her sensations. She only felt that the day was charming and life pleasant, and wished, as far as she framed any definite wish in her mind, that it might always go on so, and the day might be eternal.

His mind was intent upon his work, and he thought of nothing else. Still the presence of the girl at his side was pleasant to him and unconsciously influenced him, and he worked well and rapidly. At last he turned to her and smiled, and said, "Now I shall put you in," and pinning his sketch to

the upper part of his canvas, he drew in the outline of her figure.

"What do you think of that, Fiammetta? Is that right?"

"Exactly right. Oh, how well it comes in just there!"

"Does it really? Well, I think it does too. I am rather pleased with the beginning, and to-morrow," he cried, jumping up, "to-morrow, Fiammetta, we will begin to work seriously — with color, you know. Now there is nothing. But to-morrow we will make it laugh and sing, and it shall frown no longer in black. For to-day I have done. I must go now, for it is getting late. The light is beginning to go."

So it was: the thought that the day was over made her sigh; and the light was beginning to go from her as well as the place.

"But what shall we do with this canvas for the night?" he said; "we can hide the easel and the paint-box; but the canvas? Eh?"

"Let me carry them down to Nonna's. It is very near, and then they will be safe."

"Bravo! we will, we will, we will," he said. "Now get the donkey, and we will be off."

So Fiammetta brought the donkey, and they took their way to the Casetta, and the grandmother was delighted, she said, to take charge of them ; and so it was all arranged. Marco then shook hands with them both and mounted the donkey, and nodded to them and cried out, "*Addio — a rivederci* — to-morrow at the same hour, you know, Fiammetta !" and off he went ; and Fiammetta watched him till he was out of sight ; and her grandmother stood at her side, and watched with her, and said, —

"He has a pleasant face and pleasant ways with him, has n't he, Fiammetta ? Not a bit like his father — who was a cold, proud man. He takes after his mother, and looks like her too. How do you like him, Fiammetta ? Was he pleasant to you to-day ? Why don't you answer, child ? Don't you like him ?"

"Yes," said Fiammetta, "I like him."

"Don't you want to go there — and let him paint you and make a picture of you ?"

"Yes !" said Fiammetta.

"Well, it seems as if you did not care about it much."

"Oh yes. I do."

"Well, why don't you say so ?"

"I do."

"Well, child, come in now."

"In a moment, Nonna."

"Don't wait long. I've something for you to do;" and so saying Gigia went in, and left Fiammetta gazing down the road, and there she stood for a half hour.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next day Marco came on the donkey to the Casetta, to get his things and carry them to the torrent, where he was painting. Gigia met him at the door as he came up and was dismounting, and cried, —

“*Buon giorno!*” and then added, “Oh, you have come for your things, Signor Conte. Fiammetta has carried them all to the place an hour ago. She thought you might arrive earlier, and you will find everything right and ready for you there.”

“I am sorry she took that trouble. They are heavy, and the donkey could take them up very well.”

“No! She thought she would carry them up herself, and put them all in order.”

“It was very kind of her. Well, good-by, Gigia. I’ll be off at once, so as to lose no time.”

When he arrived he found everything ready and in order, as Gigia had said; and Fiammetta greeted him with a smile, and he

lifted his finger at her and shook his head, and said, —

“Oh, Fiammetta, you should not have done this. These things are too heavy for you to carry. You must not do it again.”

“Oh,” she laughed, “they are no weight at all, signor; I am used to it; and I thought I would have everything here and ready for you, so as to save time. I am not a lady, signor. What was it to me to bring these things up? — nothing but a pleasure. But if you don’t like it” —

“It was very kind; but you must not take so much trouble for me. Another time we will bring them up on the donkey.”

“As you command, signor,” and her face clouded a little.

Marco perceived it, and said, “It is no command of mine, Fiammetta. I thought of you only, and wanted to save you this trouble. I cannot bear to think of you carrying all this weight on your head through the sun.”

Then her face lightened, and she went and tied the donkey in the shadow, and came back smiling, and Marco made all his preparations, and began at once to work.

“You do not wish me to go and sit on the rock, as I did before?”

"Not yet ; a little later, when I have laid in a little of the general effect, and blotted on a little color."

She looked at him for a time as he worked, curious and interested, and then she seated herself on the grass at his feet, and plucked the flowers that were growing profusely everywhere. And the brook murmured, and the trees rustled, and the birds sang, and a white cloud now and then strayed over the sky, and floated calmly and slowly along, and the idle butterflies wavered about, and all was calm and tender and exquisite — a day for dreaming. They did not talk much, only at intervals, for he was busy at his work, and thinking of that : and she — it would be difficult to say what she was thinking of ; nothing, she would have said, had you asked her.

"I do not see that I am of much help to you," at last she said.

"Oh yes, you are. I shall want you to take your place on that boulder in a few minutes, and meantime you help me too by sitting near me."

"How, signor ?"

"No matter how. The air helps me, the whisper in the trees helps me, the sound of

the brook helps me, the song of the birds helps me, and in the same way you do. They are influences — so are you. Do you wish to go away ? ”

“ Oh no, signor ; that was not what I meant. I like to sit here, if I am not in your way.”

“ Anything but that. Don’t be troubled because I do not talk to you. You see I am very busy.”

“ Yes, signor ; but I was afraid I might be in your way, as I cannot do anything for you.”

“ Well, Fiammetta, you can do something for me. When I saw you here first you were singing. Won’t you sing me something now ? ”

“ Oh, signor, I do not know how to sing ; and then I only know the little *stornelli* and *rispetti* of the country. They would not please you.”

“ Not please me ! I beg your pardon. I think they are charming. There is nothing I like so much. Do you know many of them ? ”

“ Oh yes ; I know them all — that is, all that we sing here.”

“ Will you sing me one ? ”

"What will I sing you? I don't know which one to choose."

"Sing the first that you think of."

She paused a moment; and then, without making any excuses — as if it was a matter of course that she should do as he bade her — she began the following: —

"Era di Maggio, e ben me ne ricordo
Quando ci cominciammo a ben volere.
Eran fiorite le rose dell' orto
E le ciliege doventavan neri.
Le doventavan nere nella rama
Allor ti vidi, e fosti la mia dama.
Passo l'estate, e già cade la foglia
Di far teco all' amor non ho più voglia."

Her voice was sweet and silvery. She sang these verses in half-voice, and in accord with the whole scene. The air was plaintive, and in the minor key, as nearly all the popular airs are in Italy, and lent itself to the melancholy sentiment of the words.

"Sing it again, it is exquisite!" said Marco; and she sang it again. And when she had finished, he said, "Sing me another, please; don't stop." Then she began again:

"Bella, bellina che ti ha fatto gli occhi
Chi te l'ha fatto tanto innamorati
Di sotto terra caveresti i morti
Dal letto caveresti gli ammalati
De sotto terra caveresti noi
Mi son levato il cor per darlo a voi."

“That, too, is beautiful. What a tender, exquisite air, and how charmingly you sing, Fiammetta! Your voice is so sweet, and refined, and strong too, that you might make your fortune if you would study for the opera!”

“Oh, signor! I have such a poor little voice. You are laughing at me, I am afraid. You should hear Olivia sing these songs. Ah! she has a voice worth hearing, and mine is not.”

“I don’t care about hearing Olivia; I’d rather hear you. Sing me some more, won’t you?”

“If you wish,” and again she sang, —

“Fior d’amaranto!

Mi son sognato non m’amavi punto
Quando mi son svegliato aveva pianto.
Volgite indietro bocchino da baci
Quanto mi piace nel farce al amor.

“Fiorin d’amore!

Quando soffia l’aquilone s’affosca il mare
Quando spunta l’amore nasce il dolore.
Volgite indietro, etc.

“Fiorin d’amore!

Tre cose non si possono scordare
La patria, l’amicizia, ed il primo amore.
Volgite indietro,” etc.

“‘Fior d’amaranto’ again,” said Marco;
and she did as he requested.

"That is sad, sad enough. Why are all these songs so sad?" said he.

"Because, I suppose, that love is always sad in the end, at least with people in our condition. I don't know how it is with persons in such a high condition as yours. But with us, love is a flower of youth that blooms in spring for an hour, and then fades and has no fruit; or if it has, the fruit is only bitter and poisonous berries, like the belladonna, signor."

"Oh, not always, certainly not always."

"I don't know; but I am afraid it almost always is killed by hard work and want and privation, frost-struck."

"You take a melancholy view."

"I look at life around me as I see it. I dare say it looks different to you, and I am glad it does. I hope, signor, it always will."

"And I hope to you it will always be like to-day, bright and clear. You are happy now, at all events."

"Ah, signor, I fear most when I am happiest, and I am happy now."

"Well, sing me one more song, — I will only ask you for one more."

And again she sang as follows: —

“Con quelle occhi neri neri
Tu mi hai rapito, Tu mi hai rapito, il cuor a me
Ma non do le sian sinceri
Si il tuo cuore, Si il tuo cuore, pensa a me
Tu mi fai struggere a poer, a poer
Mi fai morire di dolor.
Tu mi fai struggere a poer, a poer
Mi fai morire di dolor.”

“Thank you, Fiammetta,” said Marco, as she finished. “And these *occhi neri neri*, I will believe to be *sinceri, sinceri*.”

“Ah, that they are, signor, if you mean mine ; and I don’t think they will ever make anybody die of dolor.”

“Ah, who knows, Fiammetta ? Is there nobody, nobody, nobody ? ”

“No, signor ; nobody, nobody, nobody.”

“Are you sure, sure, sure ? ”

“Yes, signor ; I am sure, sure, sure, as you say.”

“Then perhaps you will take a seat on that boulder, just as you were yesterday.”

She sprang up to the rock, and poised herself lightly there, with the natural unconscious grace of some wild animal, and turning round, said, “Like this ? Am I right ? ”

“A little more towards me, — not quite so much. Your foot a little lower. That’s right. Don’t stir. You will never better that.”

And it would have been difficult to better it, it was so charming. There was a kind of sweet frank radiance in her face, as if it had taken in all the charm of the place; a happy tender look too, as of a faint veil of pensiveness — such pensiveness as does not detract from happiness, but lends to it an added charm and refinement.

“It is strange,” he thought, “where did this girl get that expression? Ah! if I could only convey to my canvas fire and light and sparkle and tenderness too. ‘The mind, the music breathing from her face,’” he muttered to himself.

“Heavens! how much better nature is than art. Art is all very well — but — but — ah, if I could only breathe this soul on to my canvas! Ah yes! ‘And beauty born of murmuring sound shall pass into thy face’ — that is exactly it. The brook’s murmur is in her face, and its sparkle too;” and he hummed it over and over again. “‘And beauty born of murmuring sound shall pass into her face.’”

When the artist’s heart and soul are in his work, and his imagination is alive, the hand is a servant, and must yield its obedience. Unwillingly indeed at times; but

when the happy hour comes, willingly, and so it was now. Marco painted fast, and all that he sought for was before him, to pluck and make his own if he could. Fortunately the hand was not rebellious, and when at last he laid down his brush, he was content with his day's work. "If I do not lose what I have got, I think this will be my best picture," he thought. "But, ah! it is so easy to lose. I will let the face alone for to-day; and now," he cried to Fiammetta, "I have done, I will keep you no longer. Poor child! you must be tired. But you have been so good, I thank you a thousand times;" and then he began to sing, —

"Fior d'amaranto!
Mi son sognato non m'amavi punto."

And she joined in, —

"Quando mi son svegliato aveva pianto."

"No! no!" he interrupted, "we will have no *pianto* to-day," and then he sang, —

"Era di Luglio, e ben me ne ricordo
Quando ci cominciammo a ben volere,
Eran fiorite le rose dell' orto
E le ciliege doventavan neri."

"No, signor," said Fiammetta; "'Era di Maggio,' it begins."

"What did I say?"

“Era di Luglio.”

“Well; I must be right, for, you see, it was when the cherries were growing black and ripe, and that is July here.”

“So it is, signor. I never thought of that before.”

Then she came round behind him, saying, “With permission, may I?” and looked at the canvas, and exclaimed, “Oh, signor! oh, signor!”

“What is it, Fiammetta?”

“Oh, signor! signor! it is so” — and then she stopped, and went on: “But it does not look like me. No, no! never!”

“That’s the way you look to me, Fiammetta.”

“Ah no, signor! that cannot be.”

“Why cannot it be?”

“I don’t know; but it cannot — no, it cannot!” and she looked into his face, and the tears came into her eyes, and then she turned away abruptly.

“What is the matter with the girl?” thought Marco. “This is very odd.”

“You don’t like it then, Fiammetta?” he said.

“Oh, signor! like it? Oh yes! I think it is beautiful — too beautiful for me a thousand times!”

“Nonsense, Fiammetta. Did you want me to make you ugly?”

“I wanted you to do just what you have done — only — no matter, signor. I cannot say what I mean, only I was so surprised. You will excuse me, signor, won’t you? I am only an *ignorante*.”

Marco did not understand; but he saw she was confused, and remained silent. Then he said gayly, “Well, now we must bid good-by for to-day to the Naiad’s Nook. Let us call this place the Naiad’s Nook, Fiammetta. It has another name, I suppose; but no matter. We will have a name of our own to call it by, no matter whether anybody else knows what we mean, if we know ourselves. You shall be the Naiad, and this your nook; and you shall sing to its music, and protect it, and be its guardian spirit; and I will be — what will I be? — I will be out of the question, or an intruder, say?”

“No, signor; you shall be the magician that makes the Naiad come forth and show herself; and you shall robe her with beauty that she has not, and you shall wave your wand and make her look like an angel, and the whole place you shall enchant; and when others come here to see the Naiad, they will

see only a common little brook to drink from, and a plain little peasant girl sitting on a rock, looking stupid ; and that shall be the difference between the magician and poet and the stupid boor, who comes only to quench his thirsty lips."

"I am content to be the magician, if, when I wave my wand, my Naiad comes forth and smiles on me."

"And she will always."

"Always is a long time, Fiammetta. Nothing delightful comes to us always ; only once in a while, when it chooses, on summer days like this."

"Oh if summer would last forever !"

"Oh if youth would leave us never ! (he continued.)

Oh if the joy we have in the spring

Forever its happy song would sing,

And love and friendship never take wing,

But stay with us forever !

Then — ah then ! — if such gifts were given,

Who of us mortals would ask for heaven ?"

"I never heard that *rispetto* before," said Fiammetta.

"Nobody ever did," he answered ; "I never did myself. You began it and I finished it, so we both invented it. There is nothing new in it. It is the song we are always singing — everybody is always sing-

ing — sometimes to one air and sometimes to another.”

“ Won’t you sing it again ? ”

“ I cannot ; it is gone. The birds fly away when we try to catch them.”

“ I have set a trap for them in my memory, signor. Wait a minute ; ” and she stopped and looked up into the sky sideways for a minute, and then she clapped her hands and cried, “ I have caught them, signor ; I have caught the birds ! ” and then she repeated the words.

“ Bravo ! ” he cried ; “ what a memory you have ! ”

“ Oh ! that is easy enough. The rhymes make me remember them,” and then she sang, —

“ Oh if summer would last forever !
Oh if youth would leave us never !
Oh if the joy we have in the spring
Forever its happy song would sing,
And love and friendship never take wing,
But stay with us forever !
Then — ah then ! — if such gifts were given,
Who of us mortals would ask for heaven ? ”

“ I shall sing that now, signor, all summer long, and all winter long perhaps.” And thus the day drew to a close ; and they walked towards home together, carrying all

his things to the Casetta ; and then she accompanied him a little way on, till they came to the turning of the hill. There they shook hands, and parted. He had hardly gone one hundred paces when, on putting his hand into his pocket, he felt the little box of corals, that he had quite forgotten. Then he cried out, "Ho ! Fiammetta !" She had not moved from the place, but was looking after him as he disappeared and reappeared through the trees. She came running towards him.

"What is it, signor ?"

He held out the box and said, "Here is something I brought for you this morning, and I quite forgot to give it to you. I want you to take it and wear it to-morrow. It will be just a little bit of color on your neck that I wish to put into the picture ; or, stop ! let me put it on for you."

She smiled, and came forward to him, and he clasped it on her neck. "There !" he said, "it is just the thing I wanted, and it just suits your complexion. Be sure you don't forget to wear it."

"I will take good care of it, signor," she said.

Then he said good-by again, and went

away. She lingered a few moments, and then slowly sauntered homewards. As soon as she thought he had gone so far that it would be impossible for him to see her, she put her hands up to her neck, unclasped the coral necklace, gazed at it for a few minutes, and then pressed it to her lips, and kissed it again and again. Poor Fiammetta! she did not quite understand what it all meant that was passing in her mind, but she was happy and pleased; and the *grilli* that sang their tiny chimes to her all the way home chirped a low murmuring accompaniment of pleasure to her dreaming thoughts. All the world looked gentle and kind, and seemed to smile on her that evening.

Again and again she stopped, looked at the necklace, and kissed it, and then clasped it round her neck; and as she did this the thought came over her: "What will Nonna say when she sees this?" and this troubled her for a moment. But give it up she could not, let Nonna say and think what she chose.

Just as she anticipated, the first words that Nonna spoke after she came into the house were: "What is that you have on your neck, Fiammetta? It looks like coral."

"It is coral, Nonna."

"Where did you get it? Did the Signor Conte give it to you?"

"No," said Fiammetta; "he did not give it to me. He lent it to me, and asked me to wear it, so that he could paint it in his picture."

"Oh!" said her grandmother, "that alters matters. Let me look at it," and she examined it closely. "They are beautiful, very beautiful corals," she said. "I know something about such things, and I don't know that I ever saw such beautiful ones. And what is this stone in the clasp? Why, Fiammetta, it is a diamond!"

"A diamond?" cried Fiammetta.

"Yes, yes! I remember this very string and this very clasp. It belonged to the Countess his mother. I have often seen her wear it, years ago. You must be very careful of it, Fiammetta. It is very valuable, and what would he say if you lost it?"

"I will be very careful. I will not lose it, Nonna. I will keep it on my neck, so that I cannot lose it."

CHAPTER IX.

THE days and the weeks went away, and autumn was drawing near. Every day Marco came to the Naiad's Nook, and every day Fiammetta was there, and the picture was nearly finished. Sometimes now the weather changed — the sky was overcast, or it rained — and Marco did not come; and all those days Fiammetta was sad, uneasy, and listless, and could interest herself in nothing, but would sit at the window and silently gaze at the gray world outside in its shroud of mist, or watch the trickling tears of rain drag down the bleared panes, wondering if the day would ever come to an end, so lonely and wearisome was her heart. And then the sun would shine out again, and Marco would arrive, and she was again happy. But as the autumn came on, she began to think that the time was coming, and coming all too fast, when the picture would be finished; and he would go away and return no more, and she would be left alone, and then what should she do?

Little by little the child's whole heart had been given to him. He had never spoken a word of love to her, though he had always been kind and affectionate. Long before she acknowledged it to herself, she had loved him. She could not help it. She did not wish to help it. Her love was a secret joy that illuminated all her life, and was inextricably mingled with her every thought and act. She had hidden it as well as she could, with jealous care, but sometimes she could not help asking herself why he did not see it; and oh! if he did, what could become of her? what right had she to love him, he was so far above her? It was like the desire of the moth for the star, of the day for the morrow. It was pure and tender, yet passionate at times; and at times she gave way when alone to fits of wild weeping and almost of despair. But when he came and was near her, and talked with her, it all changed again; and she looked at him and felt his presence cheer and lift her, and give color to all her life, and she was happy.

Did he love her? Was it possible that he could love her? she asked herself. Yes, she thought, as a master loves his dog that follows him, and is unhappy at his absence.

But more than that — ah, no! — more than that she must not ask for. Was she not satisfied that he was so constant, so kind, so affectionate; that he had never taken advantage of her love, which it was impossible that he did not feel? Was it all purely in his mind — was there nothing in his senses that drew him to her? Did he never long to take her in his arms — as she longed to throw her arms about him, and pour out her whole heart to him? Sometimes she thought that she should not be able to resist the impulse that came wildly over her to fling herself upon his breast and cry, “I love you! I love you!” Sometimes when he stood beside her, and she felt his breath upon her cheek, she thought, “Why does he not seize me and carry me with him? I am his; he must know it. Does he never have such impulses?”

Ah, yes! Fiammetta, he knew them too well. It was only with the utmost self-control that he could resist them. At times the blood mounted into his brain as she stood at his side; all his senses were aflame; he longed to seize her and clasp her to his heart and smother her with kisses, and his heart sometimes so throbbed that he knew not

what he was doing. His struggles with himself were often desperate. Was it possible that this girl should stand at his side — her love beaming out of her every look, thrilling at every casual touch — and he not know it? He knew it but too well, and he saw it with fear.

But he remembered the sad story of her mother. It had made a deep, an indelible impression on him; and from the first he had sworn to himself a solemn oath that he would never injure her, and never take advantage of her ignorance or her love. Firm as he was of character — obstinate even in many things — this resolution, hard as it was to keep, he adhered to. He was attracted — deeply touched and moved in every fibre by her — but “No!” he said to himself, “I will never break her heart: I will never ruin her. I will not have that crime on my conscience!” And then he acknowledged to himself that he loved her. Strongly as he fought against this, he had to acknowledge it, and this made it still harder. But “No!” he said, “I cannot marry her. That would be a folly.” “But why not marry her?” he then would ask himself. “She is pure — she is good — she

is beautiful — she is devoted to me. She loves me as probably — nay, certainly — no one will ever love me again.” And then he imagined what would happen if he did marry her, and took her back with him to a totally different life and society and surroundings. Here alone with nature, in the woods, among the trees, or by the mountain torrent, nothing could be more charming, more in harmony with everything. She was simply a child of nature, and here the whole framework of her life lent a beauty and grace to her every act and word, — a fragrance as of a wild flower exhaled from her, as of a wild flower one plucks from the rugged mountain top, where it grows all alone. But that very flower transplanted into the garden or the greenhouse, among the rarest products, the most perfect exotics, brought to perfection by careful selection and cultivation, how would it look there? These questions tormented him, and he knew no solution to them. His heart pressed him in one direction, his reason in another.

Once only had he given way, and then but for a moment. He had worked later than usual one afternoon, and twilight had almost overtaken him ere he was aware of it.

Suddenly he perceived that the light had almost gone, and he hurried to put his things in order, and go away. He was detained at the Casetta by Antonio, who wished to consult him on a little affair ; and evening had already drawn down when he took leave. Fiammetta insisted on accompanying him as usual to the bend of the road, which they had named Il Dono, because he had there clasped the corals on her neck. The evening was exquisite. The moon had already risen, and poured its silvery light over all the pure, cloudless sky. Scarcely a breath of air was astir. Here and there the faint stars shone, almost lost in the full radiance of the larger light. The *grilli* were trilling a myriad infinitesimal bells in the grasses. It was one of those tender evenings that stir the soul and touch it with a thrill, and awaken dim memories and fond hopes.

They had been walking side by side, and for some minutes had not spoken. Yet each felt the presence of the other with a magnetic thrill. At last he stretched out his hand to her to say good-by. She did the same, and as her tender eyes looked into his with a wistful earnestness, he suddenly drew her to him, clasped her to his breast, and

kissed her. She fell into his arms with a low cry, and a moment passed that seemed an age, such was the wild tumultuous hurry of feeling that pulsed through every nerve. Then he came as it were to himself, and suddenly dropped her hand. "Oh, signor! signor!" she cried, and could say nothing else. No words could express all that she felt at that moment.

But he recovered himself, after a fierce struggle, and without saying anything, he flung out his arms with clenched hands, and turned away his face; and she stood with her arms fallen and looking down and waiting. What was to come next? What would he say and do now? Ah, how she loved him! and he must love her. Why did he not say so?

Finally he said, "I ought not to have kissed you. Forgive me, Fiammetta. I will not do it again. Good-by, and God bless you, dear Fiammetta! I do not dare to stay." And he plunged away wildly into the wood and was gone.

And she, utterly overcome, dropped down on her knees, and wept as she had never wept before, and then she brushed away her tears and rose and threw out her arms after

him ; and then she smiled a radiant smile, and cried out, — “ Oh, he loves me ! he loves me ! but why did he not say so ? Why did he rush away ? ”

She had a dim idea why, but she did not quite understand it. Still she felt through all that he loved her, and that was sunrise to her heart. Whatever might come of it, he loved her. She wandered about in the moonlight vaguely, anywhere, thinking it all over for more than an hour. She heard her grandmother call for her from the Casetta, but she would not answer. She could not go in. She could not bear to be spoken to. She could not bear the house, and the prose, the dull prose, of the house. The heavens were with her. The stars understood her. She had no need to feign before them. She could utter all her heart to them without fear. But at last she had to go in and hear her grandmother's reproaches, and answer her questions as well as she could.

“ Ah, you will go just as your mother did at last,” Gigia cried ; “ it is in the blood. You shall not go with the Conte again.”

Fiammetta could say nothing, but “ I have done no wrong, Nonna. Indeed, indeed, I have not. You must not scold me. No,

Nonna, indeed you must not. You must let me go as I have. Indeed, I *will* go. Whatever happens, I will go. Nothing shall prevent me. No! nothing; nothing; nothing."

And she ran out of the room.

Marco, on his part, in agitation and half-remorse pursued his way home. He saw that he had made a false step, and he blamed himself for it. "But who can be always master of himself?" he said. "After all, fortunately I said nothing. I pledged myself to nothing, and I will be more careful for the future." Still his conscience pricked him. "It is of no use to make excuses," he went on to himself. "I have led her on to love me, and she knows I love her. If I do not marry her, I shall none the less have ruined her happiness, if I have taught her to love me. I am not such a fool as to profess that I do not think she does love me. But how can I help that? How could I help that?" "Ah, but you could, had you chosen," whispered conscience; "and now what will you do?"

He had not much consolation in his thoughts; but he determined to be careful for the future, and promised himself that he would not go back to her for two or three

days. "But that will seem strange, will it not? The evil is done; the steed is stolen; what use to lock the door now?"

Still for a couple of days he did not return, and when he did he was not persuaded that he had bettered matters. Fiammetta's eyes sparkled as she met him, and he had great difficulty in explaining his absence. Indeed he had to invent an excuse, and pretend that he had been obliged to write letters, and had work to do at the Villa.

This was partially true. After returning home, he wrote a long letter to his friend, Carlo, from which we make some extracts:—

"I wish you were here to see the picture I have been painting, and to give me your advice about it. I followed your counsel, and have done what I think myself is my best work. Accidentally I came across a place here which exactly responds to my idea—an exquisite spot, that it was a delight to paint. And more than this, I found my Naiad there—a beautiful girl, quite out of all my hopes to find in such a place—simple, graceful, and with such eyes as you never saw. She has been my constant companion ever since I came here. Indeed, she has been my only companion, for, as you

may well imagine, there is no society here, and not a friend or even acquaintance. So Fiammetta (that is the name of my Naiad) and I have led a sort of an idyllic life for the last two months. I wish in what we call good society I might ever hope to find such a girl, so true, so beautiful, and sympathetic; so full of high poetic sense and native refinement. You will laugh at me, I know, and think I am mad to talk in this way about a girl who in condition is so far, as you would say, below me. But she is below me in nothing, not even as I suspect in birth, at least on the father's side. Her story is a curious one, but I will not write it down here. It would be too long. When we meet I will give you all the details as I have learned them: at all events there is a strain of gentle blood in her, like the graft of a precious fruit upon a strong wild stock; and I confess, dear friend, that she has quite bewitched me. You promised you would make me a visit in the autumn, and the autumn is now here. I hold you to your promise. Come, and we will talk together, as one cannot talk on paper. You will find enough to do here if you wish to work: the walks are delightful; there are passages



everywhere to sketch of exceeding beauty; and you will see my Naiad in the flesh, and she is worth seeing, and she will sing to you the most enchanting little songs, in a voice such as you will rarely hear. Besides, I want your counsel about other things than my picture. You are my best and dearest friend, and I want you here."

This was his letter, and this his excuse for not coming. When he met Fiammetta again she did not question the truth of the excuse. She was only too glad to see him again, and find there was any reason for his staying away.

"But I hope you have not missed me much," he foolishly said.

"Oh yes, I have."

"What have you been doing?"

"Waiting for you. Every day I have come here, and spent all the day, thinking every moment that you would come; but you did not, so I carried home all the things at night, and brought them back in the morning."

"Oh, I am sorry you had all that trouble, Fiammetta."

"It was no trouble; the only trouble I had was, that I was afraid, as you did not

come, that you might not be well. But I went down yesterday as far as the Villa, when it was getting too late to expect you, and there I waited near by till I saw Pietro, and he told me you were well, and then I came back."

"It was very thoughtless in me not to send you word. I had no idea you would be put to so much trouble, and would come down to the Villa to assure yourself I was well."

"But supposing you had been ill, I could not be at rest till I knew you were well."

They were neither of them quite at their ease for a time. The recollection of their last parting was in both their memories, and too strongly impressed not to create a little awkwardness. Marco was determined, if possible, to keep guard over all he said and did; and Fiammetta had a feeling that all was not exactly as it had been before, and her spirit was not free. This, however, slowly wore away as the day went on, and their previous relations were in great measure resumed. He busied himself with his work — or rather pretended to busy himself more than he really did. His thoughts, despite himself, kept running away with him, and there were long silences. Suddenly he said, —

“Do you remember your mother, Fiammetta?”

“Yes, signor, I just remember her; but you know she died when I was very young. I was scarcely five years old. I remember one day, in particular, when she took me out to walk. She was very ill, I suppose, then, for she walked very slowly, and constantly stopped to rest, and we sat down on a rock together. It was in the autumn, only a short time before she died. All at once she seized me in her arms, and pressed me to her bosom so closely that I could hardly breathe; and I was a little frightened, it was so sudden; and she burst into a fit of tears, and cried, and cried, and cried, so that I did not know what to do; and I began to cry too. And then she said, — ‘Oh, *infame!* *infame!* How can I ever pardon you? Oh, I cannot, I cannot! Try as I will, I cannot.’ And then she almost fainted away, and lay back on the grass for a while. I did not know what she meant, and I cried, and was more frightened. And by and by she sat up and said, — ‘Don’t cry, Fiammetta, and be a good girl always; and may God bless you, and make you happy — happier than your poor mother; and oh, *Madonna mia!* let

her never be deceived as I was.' And after a time she got up, and we went home."

"Poor woman!" said Marco. "You did not know what she meant, then, I suppose?"

"No, signor; but I always remembered that day, and the words she said. You know that in one's memory there are always some moments, some scenes, some words, that are stamped in deeper than others, though we know no reason why they should be. Sometimes what we remember is so trivial, when all that was important is lost. What she meant then I did not know; but I afterwards did, for Nonna told me that she was very unhappy, because my father had gone away and left her, and had treated her cruelly."

"You know nothing about your father, I suppose?"

"Nothing. I don't know whether he is living or dead. We have never heard anything about him. All that I know is that he was a gentleman, and that my mother went away with him, and came back without him, and brought me home here with her. And when Nonna is angry with me, she taunts me about him, and says he was a cruel man, and that my mother was a wilful, ob-

stinate woman, and deserved what she got, and that she might have known better than to trust him, and that if I do not mind I shall come to the same fate. But that is only when Nonna is angry; and I know she is sorry after she has said such things, for she is kinder than ever as soon as her anger is over. Poor mamma! I often cry to think of her, signor. How could she help it, signor? She loved him, and how could she refuse to go with him if he insisted upon it? She could not know that he meant any wrong to her; she could not know that he would be faithless to her and abandon her, and leave her to die all alone."

"It was all very, very sad," said Marco.

The tears had come into Fiammetta's eyes as she said this, and she sat for a time silent and thoughtful; and Marco, touched by her simple words, resolved even more firmly than before to guard his own words and actions, and made a solemn vow to himself not to betray her, and not to play with her affections, as conscience told him he had hitherto so carelessly done. "No!" he said, "she shall not suffer from me. I have been foolish, but I will not be base. There shall come no sorrow to her through me if I can

help it, if it is not already too late. I will finish my picture at once. I will leave her by degrees alone."

But such resolutions were easier to make than to keep, and though his picture was virtually completed, he still went back and worked at it. This idyllic life had a charm for him that he could not forego. He was more deeply interested in Fiammetta than he honestly owned to himself; and when he endeavored to stay away, he was listless and uneasy, and desired to see her. He knew the flame would burn, but he could not resolve not to flit about it. He accused himself of selfishness, but it was of no use. Then he began seriously to consider whether he might not marry her. Where could he find a purer, sweeter, and more spirited character, and a more self-forgetting devotion?

The autumn had now come, and October was in its glory. A pensive tenderness was on the atmosphere, and a feeling of melancholy veiled the world. The chestnuts were golden in the sunlight, flinging their spiny balls to the ground, and bursting to scatter there their brown and shining nuts. The luxuriant clematis wreathed with feathery tufts every wall and tree. Blackberries were

ripe on the hedges. The hawthorn and eg-lantine showed everywhere their coral hip and haws. The late wild flowers enamelled the brown earth. Jays shrieked in the woods. Quails and partridges were calling over the slopes. Hawks sailed far up in the misty light on easy curves. Everything tended to sentiment, and both Marco and Fiammetta were subdued to it. All this made it more difficult for him to end his idyl, and so it went on.

CHAPTER X.

THE picture was now finished, and Marco knew it was. There was really nothing more to do. But he did not like to acknowledge it, for then he should have no excuse to come back, and the pleasant days would be over. It would be like locking up his home to go away, — still he felt that it must come to an end, and he had a certain sense of shame in pretending that there was more to do.

One evening, when the day's work was over and he was putting together his things to carry them as usual to the Casetta, he found strength to say to Fiammetta, —

“Well, Fiammetta, the picture is done. I think I shall work no longer at it. I am afraid our sittings are over.”

“Yes,” she said, as she gazed at it, “it is done, I suppose. It has seemed to me perfect for a long time; but I am only an *ignorante*. But,” she added with a sigh, “I am sorry — so sorry. You will not come, then, any more. I shall not see you any more.”

“Not see me any more!” he exclaimed; “and why not?”

“Ah,” she said, “if the picture is finished you will have no reason to come. Why should you come?”

“So you think I shall not want to see you again,— that now my picture is finished, you will be nothing to me.”

“No,” she answered; “but it will not be the same; and oh, signor, you have been so good to me, and I have been so happy all these long days. But now the summer is gone and the autumn has come, and the picture is finished, and you too will be going, and I feel that all is over.”

“Oh no, Fiammetta, you will not get rid of me so easily as that. You will see me again to-morrow, and to-morrow, and a good many to-morrows yet. I am not going away. Do you think too that I shall not miss these pleasant days with you? See, Fiammetta, this picture has really been finished many days ago. I should have carried it away long before, had it not been for you. I wish it was not finished now, for then it would give me an excuse to come back.”

“An excuse, signor! but you need no excuse.”

"Ah yes! I do. I need it to myself and to Nonna. What would she say if I should keep coming back as before without any excuse? But I shall come back, be assured of that. We are not going to say good-by now, unless you insist on it."

"Oh no! I shall never insist on it. You know that."

"Yes; I think we are good friends enough for that, Fiammetta."

"Good friends!" The phrase did not sound aright to Fiammetta; it seemed to separate him from her. Good friends! and was that all? Well, was it not enough? What more did she expect? Ah! what she expected — what was possible — was one thing; what she longed for — what her spirit blindly desired, in spite of all probability, of all hope — was something so very different; to which mere friendship, sweet as it was, was but a mockery and a delusion. No; her heart cried out for more — infinitely more — but she said, —

"Yes; I know that we are friends."

They took their way towards the Casetta, each oppressed with thought, and saying almost nothing. As they arrived, they saw come out of the house the figure of a young

man in uniform. He advanced rapidly towards them, and cried, "Fiammetta!"

"Oh!" cried she, "Andrea, is that you? Where did you come from? This is Count Sterroni," she added; and he lifted his hat and saluted Marco stiffly, and Marco returned his salutation. Then turning to Marco, she said, "It is my cousin, Andrea."

"And where did you come from?" she cried.

"I have just come over from the Fosse. I had a leave of absence for a few days. I arrived at home this morning, and have come over to see aunt Gigia."

"And you are well?"

"Very well; and you?"

"Very well."

He was a good-looking young fellow of apparently some twenty-three years of age, well built, stout, bronzed in the sun, and wearing the uniform, low-brimmed hat, and streaming green feathers of the Bersaglieri. He took Fiammetta's hand, shook it warmly, looked her steadily in the face, and said, —

"I am glad to see you, Fiammetta, and I hope you are half as glad to see me."

"I am glad to see you — certainly, of course," said she; but there was a shadow

of anxiety and trouble in her face, and the words did not somehow ring honestly, as if she were really glad to see him. He seemed a little disappointed at her want of eagerness, and hesitated, and looked at Marco.

Marco saw that he was in their way — at all events in Andrea's way — and only added to their embarrassment by his presence. He therefore at once took his leave, shook hands with Fiammetta, and said, —

“I will leave the picture here to-night to dry thoroughly. To-morrow I will come again. Meantime I leave you to your cousin, for you will doubtless have much to say to each other. Good-night, and *rivederci* to-morrow;” and bowing to Andrea, he departed.

“Who is this cousin?” he thought. “This is the first time I have heard of him. Why did Fiammetta never mention him to me? A good-looking fellow, too. I wonder,” and he wondered a great many things in the *vager* as he made his way home.

When the morning came he was still wondering; all sorts of notions flitted across his mind. Was it possible that they had been not only cousins, but lovers? Ah no! he could not believe that. Andrea might have

been a lover to her, who knows ? but she — no, she never could have been his lover. Why not ? He did not see clearly why not ; but he felt that it was not probable — no, nor even possible.

After lingering about the Villa for a time, as the usual hour at which he went to the Casetta returned, he felt a sort of inward necessity to go there. He had nothing to do at the Villa. He was bored by himself, and almost without a decided intention he took the same road that he had travelled so often, and slowly wandered along, pausing now and then, and then again going on again. He was an hour later than usual when he came in sight of the house, and here he stopped. "Why should I go there to interrupt them?" he asked himself. "I shall only be in the way. They will have so much to talk over. Better leave them alone to-day at least. To-morrow perhaps he will be gone."

While he was thus debating the question with himself, he saw a woman's figure advancing towards him through the trees, and hidden partially by them. He thought at first it might be Fiammetta ; but as it drew near, he saw that it was Gigia. She came forward to him, and after saying good-morn-

ing, she hesitated and seemed so embarrassed that Marco asked her if anything was the matter.

"No, signor, not exactly, and — yes, I don't know how properly to say what I mean. But" —

"But what, Gigia; speak out frankly, what is it?"

"I am afraid you will be displeased with what I say."

"Oh no; but tell me at once."

"Well, signor, I have been waiting to see you for more than an hour, for I wanted to ask you — you will not be displeased, I hope — I wanted to ask you not to come to-day, if you please."

"Certainly, I won't come, if you wish. But what does this mean, Gigia? Speak out, my good woman, and tell me frankly what you have to say."

"Well, signor, since you permit me, it is this — you do not know anything about it, I know — but while Andrea is there, I am afraid that there might be trouble if you came."

"But why should there be trouble? He seemed a very good fellow."

"Ah, signor, you do not know, and I must

tell you. Andrea is Fiammetta's cousin, and they grew up together as boy and girl, and as he grew older, and got to be a man, he fell in love with her and wanted her to marry him. That was all very foolish, of course. They were too young to marry, and he had no means to support her, and besides that, Fiammetta, though she was friendly to him, never thought of him in that way — oh no, signor. She repulsed him very firmly, and said if he ever talked to her of love, she would have nothing to do with him even as a friend. He must be content with that. But he was not content, and he follows her about and annoys her with his love-making. At last he was drawn for the army, and was forced to go away and leave Fiammetta free, and now it is a long time since she has seen him until he came yesterday, and this morning he again, so Fiammetta says, persecuted her and renewed his love-talk, and Fiammetta told him once for all she would not have him, and then he grew very angry, and said it was all on account of your coming here, and he abused you, and said you only wanted to ruin Fiammetta, that you had stolen her from him, and that when he saw you he would give you a piece of his mind.

He was very angry, and I hope you will excuse him. He did not mean all that he said; but he is quick-tempered, and I thought — I thought it would be best that you and he should not meet, and Fiammetta said, too, ‘Don’t let Il Signor Conte come to-day as he promised, and please let him know why, for I am afraid of — I know not what,’ and so I came, and here I have waited for you to tell you this.”

“And are you sure that Fiammetta does not love him, and that he will not finally persuade her to marry him?”

“Oh, I am afraid not. He is a good youth, and we all like him, and we thought that she could not do better than to marry him; but she will not hear of it, and it excites her so to speak of it that we are content to hold our tongues. No, signor, that will never be. When Fiammetta has taken anything into her head, she has taken it there forever. She is a very good girl, but there is no persuading her against anything when she has set her heart on it. She would willingly accept Andrea as a friend, but never — never as a lover.”

“Perhaps with time,” said Marco.

“No, signor, it is of no use. She is like

her mother in that. You will excuse me, signor, will you not? and you will not come to the house to-day, if you please?"

"You have done very right, Gigia, and I thank you. No; I will go back, and will return after Andrea has gone away. How long does he remain?"

"He is going away to-morrow, signor. He is obliged to. His leave of absence is up, and he must go."

"Tell Fiammetta not to be troubled. I will keep out of his way and hers."

"And you excuse me, Signor Conte?"

"Excuse you! I thank you, rather."

So saying, they separated, each going their own way. On his return home Marco found a letter from his friend Carlo, which ran as follows: —

MY DEAR MARCO, — Many thanks for your letter, which I received a day or two ago. I read a great deal between its lines which is not openly said, and I am persuaded that it is high time for me to come to you and give you a little good advice, not only about your picture, which I am glad to hear is so successful, but about other matters of even more importance. I knew you would

make a good picture if you gave yourself up to your true inspiration for the ideal and the poetic; but I did not think you would find the Naiad you sought for. I shall be curious to see her. If she is all you say, she is, indeed, a *rara avis*. They do not alight by every brookside, nor are ordinarily to be found among rustics. But the world is full of wonders. Meantime, you will forgive me, as far as the rustic Naiad herself is concerned, if, despite all your enthusiasms, I take her with a good many grains of salt. However, I am ready to be converted. We shall see.

I have done little or nothing this summer, and have been travelling about in Germany. But I will tell you all about my journeyings and experiences when we meet. I have seen so many people, and been dinned to death by so much talk and so much clatter at hotels, that I shall be glad to get to a quiet place, away from all this vanity and vexation, with a friend. So count on me; I shall arrive at N—— on Wednesday, and will at once come to you. Please tell Pasquale to be there to meet me at the evening train from Bologna at six o'clock. I think it arrives at that time; but he will know.

A rivederci, then, and believe me as ever,
your affectionate CARLO FRANZINI.

Marco was delighted. His friend—his best friend—would be here in three days. He had great confidence in his judgment, and he meant to make a clean breast of all that was weighing on him, and to take his counsel. “What will he think? what will he say? Of course I know what he will think at first, but what will he say at last? That is the question.”

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT took place at the Casetta after Marco had left was this. Andrea, after his long absence, had come back full of hope — for when are a lover's hopes utterly crushed? He hoped that absence might have changed her feelings towards him. He had seen more of the world, had developed in character and spirit since she had seen him. He thought his uniform itself might produce an effect upon her. He had done well, and been praised, and was now a sergeant, and was proud of his shoulder-straps. He was no more a mere rustic, but an officer, and on the way to advancement in the best corps of Italy. He could talk better and express himself better than before; and there was nothing like despair about him when he again saw Fiammetta. The evening was spent in the house, talking over all family matters and listening to his experiences, which suffered no diminution in his recounting, and all went on in a friendly way.

But the next morning he asked Fiammetta to walk with him. She could not well refuse, though she feared what might be the result. Go, however, she did ; and they took an opposite direction from the Naiad's Nook, so that she might run no chance of meeting Marco. But it was in the early morning, and she knew that Marco would not come, if he came at all, before the afternoon, so that there were hours before them.

They had got but a little distance from the house, when Andrea said, turning abruptly to her, "Who was that Count that was with you yesterday ? and what is he doing here ?"

The manner of the question was offensive ; but she answered quietly, "It is Conte Marco Sterroni. He has been painting a picture of the torrent up beyond the house."

"Oh !" said Andrea. "And how long has he been coming here ?"

"For some weeks he has been painting, if you mean that."

"I have seen his picture. Who did he paint that figure from ?"

"From me. He asked me to be his model, and Nonna had no objection ; and I saw no reason why I should not assist him, and I sat for it."

"Ah! You see no reason why you should not be his model?"

"No."

"I see a good many reasons."

"I do not."

"I suppose he flattered you, and made love to you, and made you think — well, God knows what he made you think."

"He neither flattered nor made love to me."

"Ah, that is very well to say. You spent weeks there with him in the woods all alone. That you admit. Well, it has n't a very good look. What did you do?"

"Andrea," said she, "I do not know what right you have to question me in this way. I do not like it. If you were not an old friend, I should tell you that you are very impertinent."

"You are ruining your reputation out here in the woods day after day with a Signor Conte, as you call him. Who knows what you have been about? Do you dream he will ever marry you? Ah, I think so, Signora Contessa, *vi faccio un inchino*, as they say in the play. No, no! he will never do that — not he. What then will he do except ruin you? and you are such a fool as

not to see it. He is a poor miserable scoundrel — that is what I think of him — to wile you on to this.”

The blood mounted into Fiammetta’s face, and her eyes were aflame. She could bear it as long as he spoke of her, for she felt that she had been perhaps foolish ; but when he used such expressions towards Marco, she could not bear it.

“*Addio*, Andrea,” she said. “I will talk with you no longer. I will have nothing to do with you. You have no respect for anybody, and the sooner you leave here the better. *Addio*; I will see you no more.”

So saying, she rapidly left him. He ran after her, overtook her, and strove to stop her. She struggled to get away from him ; but he seized her round the waist, and then catching both her arms in his strong clutch, held her to him face to face.

“No, no, no !” he cried, “you shall not leave me. Do you not see, Fiammetta, that I love you ; that you are all the world to me ; that I am eaten up with jealousy ; that I am afraid to lose you ? I will not say anything to offend you. Listen to me. I love you, and I cannot bear even the thought that any one else should have you.”

"Enough, enough, Andrea. Loose me; let me go."

"No, no! Fiammetta, dearest Fiammetta, I will not let you go. You are mine; you must be mine."

"I am not yours, and I never will be yours. Do you think you can force me by violence to love you? I have told you over and over again I do not and I cannot love you. I hoped that you remembered this, and that we might be friends; but unless you let me go, we will not even be that."

All his answer was to draw her to him, and kiss her on the lips.

"Shame! beast!" she cried. "I hate you! let me go!"

"No; you shall not go till I tell you all I feel."

She struggled with him without speaking. At last he let her go. She started back.

"I will never forgive you," she said. "You have insulted me. I will tell my grandfather and my grandmother, and they shall drive you from the house."

The recollection of that kiss of Marco's came over her. Andrea had profaned it, and this she could not forgive him. In her outraged sense she hated him for the moment,

and would willingly have struck him dead at her feet. Then she broke down, and cried and sobbed like a child, and stammered out convulsively, "Oh, I could not have believed it; I could not have believed it. Oh, Andrea, why did you do this? *O Dio mio! Dio mio!*"

Her weeping overcame him more than her passion. It calmed him. He implored her to forgive him. He was not master of himself. He did not mean to hurt her. She held up her arms piteously to him. The marks of his clench were red upon them. "I did not mean to hurt you," he said again.

"Go away and leave me!" she said. "I cannot endure the sight of you. You have hurt me infinitely more in my heart than in my arms."

"Do you love that scoundrel?" cried Andrea, his anger getting again the better of him.

"Whether I do or not, you have no right to ask."

"So you confess it?"

"I confess nothing. You are not my master. I owe you no confessions."

"Let him look out for himself," cried

Andrea. "Let him not come across my path, Count or no Count. I will make short work of him if I see him. Damn him, and all his race!"

"Andrea," she cried, "if you dare to insult him, or to touch a hair of his head, my curse shall be on you, and God's curse. If no one else does, I will avenge him."

"You will avenge him!" he sneered; "and how, I pray?"

"Leave it to me, and you will see. You think because I am a weak girl that I can do nothing. Do not push me to extremities. I would fain be friends with you; but if you wish, I can be your enemy; and, weak as I am, I will bring your head and your heart down to the dust. I am not afraid of you."

So saying, she left him, and he did not follow her. She rushed to the house, wild and haggard with excitement, and cried to her grandmother, "Andrea has insulted me! he has threatened to kill the Conte if he meets him. Run, Nonna, run down the road; meet him, find him, and tell him not to come or there will be a quarrel! Don't lose a moment, Nonna. Andrea is just out there," pointing to the spot where she had left him, "and what he may do or where he

may go I know not. But he is very angry and very excited. He is jealous of the Conte, and I am afraid of what may happen."

So Gigia ran down, met the Count, and prevented him from coming, as we have seen.

After a time Andrea returned to the house, somewhat calmed and somewhat ashamed of his violent conduct. There he saw Gigia, and he poured out his griefs to her; and when she attempted to laugh at him and to show him that his jealousy was ridiculous, — that Marco had only wished Fiammetta as a model; that he had always been perfectly proper and kind and gentle; and that as for his making love to her, that was all nonsense, there was nothing between them, and never had been and never would be, — he cried :

"That is all very well; but you are blind. I see it all as plainly as this tree before me, and you will find it out at last. Fiammetta is no longer the same person that she was. He has bewitched her, and he has done it for no good purpose. It will end as it did with her mother, you mark my words. He is a scoundrel, and that is the long and the short of it, and he means to ruin her, if he

has not already! I know — I know — I know; it is of no use to talk to me.”

“It is all miserable jealousy on your part,” said Gigia, “and you ought to be ashamed of it. You have insulted and frightened Fiammetta, and this is a pretty way to win her love. Why did you not hold your tongue? You know she cannot be driven in that way. The Count will soon be gone, and if you had let her alone, she would probably have come round to you at last. But now you have made a pretty mess of it.”

“I suppose I have,” he said, sullenly. “But it’s done; there’s no help for it now. I can’t undo it.”

“What remains for you to do is to go and beg her pardon, and make all the excuse you can. She is very much irritated with you, and if you hope ever to have any chance with her, you must go to her at once and be as abject as possible. There is no use in being violent; that is no way to win her.”

“I suppose,” he said, “you are right; I will do as you say. Will you call her, and tell her I want to see her?”

Gigia went up to Fiammetta’s room, into which she had locked herself, and knocked at the door. At first Fiammetta did not

answer. She had thrown herself on the bed, buried her face in the pillows, and was weeping bitterly. At last, after Gigia had called her over and over again, she rose and opened the door.

“Oh, Fiammetta *mia* !” she cried, when she saw her, “what is the matter? Why are you crying so? Don’t fret like this, my dearest child. It is all really nothing. Yes, yes; I know Andrea was violent, and lost his temper; but, *Madonna mia* ! we all do that at times. He has told me all about it, Fiammetta *mia* ! and he is very sorry.”

“He may well be,” said Fiammetta.

“Well, he *is*, dear — very, very sorry; and he wants to see you and tell you so, and to beg your pardon. Come down and see him.”

“No!” said Fiammetta, sternly; “I will not. I will have nothing to do with him henceforward or forever.”

“Oh yes, you will,” said Gigia, tenderly; and she took the girl in her arms and strove to soothe her. “He did not mean what he said. You will forgive him?”

“No!” said Fiammetta, “I will not forgive him. He insulted me, and he insulted the Count; and he seized me and kissed me,

and I will not forgive him. You may go and tell him so."

"Oh, that was all because he did not understand, and was jealous; and nobody is jealous unless they love, and you know he loves you."

"Loves me? loves me, indeed! Then I hate him all the more because of that. I never gave him any right, and I will not have him, and you may tell him so, and I will not see him. It is of no use trying to persuade me, Nonna. I mean to stay here in my room till he has gone."

It was vain to oppose her, and finally Gigia gave it up, and went down and told Andrea that she would not see him, and she advised him that the best thing he could do was to go away. "She will soften in time towards you; but now it is useless to do anything — you will only provoke her more. If you take my advice," she said, "you will go away at once, and leave the rest to me — *se è Rosa fiorira*, as the saying goes."

"I suppose you are right. It is hard on me — very hard; but I was a fool. I might have known better."

"Yes; you have n't done very well for yourself."

"Well, I will go ; but let me wait here till to-morrow morning. Perhaps she will think better of it by that time."

"Well, stay if you choose ; but I do not advise it."

So he remained, in no very pleasant condition of mind — angry with himself, angry with her, angry with Marco — irritated, sorry, and not knowing what to do. Fiammetta was true to her resolution. She remained in her room all day — fleeing there for silence, and to hide herself, like a wounded thing. For all that Andrea had said, fiercely as she had rejected it, weighed on her thought and troubled her deeply ; and a pain came across her that she had never felt before so acutely.

Nothing was said to Antonio ; and when supper came, he asked for Fiammetta, and why she did not come down, and he was told that she was not well, and had a bad headache, and was lying down, and that it would be best not to wake her ; and "I will take her up something to eat by and by," said Gigia, "when I am sure she is awake. We'd better leave her to rest now."

It was a melancholy supper — all the life had gone out of the house ; but they got through it without a suspicion on the part of Antonio, and so far so well.

In the morning Andrea went up and knocked at her door.

"It is I — Andrea," he cried. "I am going away, and have come to bid you good-by. I am very, very sorry. Try to find some excuse for me. Come and shake hands with me, and say you forgive me."

"I forgive you," she said, "and good-by;" but she would not come out and see him.

After she learned from Gigia that he had gone, she came down; but a change had come over her. She said little, lingered about the house or in the grounds near it, so as to have it always in view, lest Marco should come and find her gone, and waited vainly for she knew not what. But Marco did not come, and it was a miserable day.

The next morning, as she was standing at the edge of the wood watching for him, she saw the donkey approaching through the trees. Her heart leaped up within her, and she smiled a happy smile, and clapped her hands, and cried to herself, "He has come!"

But she was mistaken. Instead of Marco, as the donkey drew near, she saw it was the *fattore*, Pietro, and her heart went down again.

"Good-morning," said Pietro, gayly.
"How are you, Fiammetta?"

"Well, thank you, Pietro; and you?"

"Well, thank you."

"And the Signor Conte?"

"Well, too. He has sent me up to bring down his picture and all his things, as he could not come himself, and he bade me give you this letter."

She seized it with impatience, which she could not conceal, opened it, and read as follows:—

DEAR FIAMMETTA,— I could not come myself this morning, and you will know why. If you do not, your grandmother will tell you. So I have sent Pietro for the picture, which I will thank you to give him, with the paint-box and all the other things, that I shall not need there, now that the picture is finished. I hope to see you very soon, when your cousin has gone, and I suppose he will go to-day, from what your grandmother told me. But I am afraid I shall not be able to come to-morrow, as I am expecting a great friend of mine to arrive, who is coming to stay with me for a week or so. I shall, with your permission, bring him to see

you. *A rivederci*, then, my dear Fiammetta,
with all best wishes, from your affectionate
friend,
MARCO STERRONI.

There was nothing that gave her any satisfaction in this letter except the words, "I hope to see you soon," and "Your affectionate friend." All the rest was a blow to her. A friend coming — who was it? Ah, if any friend was coming, that would end all the old happy course of things, no matter who he might be. She turned to Pietro and said, —

"The Signor Conte tells me that he is expecting a friend to stay with him. Do you know who it is?"

"Oh yes; it is the Signor Carlo Franzini — one of his oldest friends. He got a letter from him the night before last, telling him he would be here to-morrow. A good friend he is, too. It was he who took the Signor Padrone away with him to Rome, some ten years ago, and first taught him how to paint. The Conte is very fond of him."

"Ah yes," said Fiammetta. "I have heard him speak of this friend often."

"The signor told me that your cousin

Andrea was here, and told me to ask if he was gone."

"Yes; he has gone. Please tell the Signor Conte that he is gone. He went away yesterday morning."

"He has grown to be a fine young fellow, I hear, and has made a good step forward in his company. They tell me he is a sergeant. Is that true?"

"Yes," said Fiammetta.

"And he wore his uniform when he was here?"

"Yes."

"I should like to have seen him with his green feathers. I suppose he was proud enough of them and of his advancement. Well, I am glad to hear he is getting on so well. I always liked him. He was a favorite of yours too, Fiammetta, I believe. Was he not?"

"We are cousins."

"Yes, yes. I know that, and perhaps will be something more some day. Eh, Fiammetta? But I want to pry into no secrets. What will be, will be! and, as the old proverb says, 'Fate comes at last to the slow and the fast.' Well, well! I only wish for the best for you, Fiammetta."

"Thank you for your good wishes ; but Andrea is nothing but my cousin, and never will be."

"Well, well ! Here I am chatting and the time is going, and I must go in and see your grandmother and grandfather, and get the picture."

Fiammetta accompanied him, and all the things were brought out and put upon the donkey, and after a little chat with Gigia, Pietro went off with them.

Fiammetta watched him go, with a sad sinking of the heart. As long as they were with her, she knew that Marco would return ; but now, even if he came back, it would be only now and then, and not as before. Besides, she had a strong presentiment that the arrival of his friend Carlo would change all their relations. There would, at best, be only a meeting, at intervals more or less long. He must give his time to his guest, and when they met it would probably be only in the presence of this friend, who would, perhaps, influence Marco against her, and perhaps would carry him away with him as he did before. Nothing was clear to her — a cloud was everywhere on her horizon, rising slowly and threatening to cover the whole sky.

CHAPTER XII.

CARLO arrived on Wednesday night, and was greeted heartily by Marco. He was thoroughly glad to see his old friend ; and after supper they talked together of Carlo's travels and experiences since they parted, and of old friends and how they were, and where they were. Nothing very intimate was touched upon the first night ; and as Carlo was tired with his long day's journey, he soon went to bed, and left Marco to his solitary meditations.

The next morning they wandered about and visited all the old haunts, and walked through the woods for an hour or two, and then returned to the house.

"Now," said Carlo, "let me see your picture." Marco went into his room, brought it out and set it on the easel ; and Carlo took a long, careful look at it. Then he rose, and patting Marco on his back, said, "Bravo ! I like it immensely. It is full of poetry, and has the essential romantic charm that should

belong to such a conception. Your landscape is admirable, the composition is very harmonious, the color is good, the drawing good. But what strikes me most of all is the Naiad herself. Charming! my dear fellow, charming! full of grace and *naïveté* and simplicity, and with a tender pensiveness of expression and character. That, of course, came from you; your model never had it, I am sure."

"Ah, there you are wrong," said Marco. "It is simply a portrait of the sweetest and most charming creature you ever saw. No; I have not flattered her, though you shake your head — I have not, really. When you see her, you will find that I have not even done her justice."

"You were a lucky dog to find such a model," said Carlo, smiling. "Whether I shall see all that you saw in her is another question, and I still say your imagination lent her the charm that you reproduced in this figure. Your imagination, or something more personal of feeling and sentiment. Of course, all things are as they seem to us, not as they really are; and you saw her through deeply-colored glasses, if you tell me she looked to you thus."



"I painted what I saw only. Of course, I don't know that she will look like this to you. To me she did. You shall see her yourself and judge. The fact is, that the whole scene is a direct transcript from nature, with scarcely a change. I was not thinking about the subject. It was only vaguely in my mind, when, one day sauntering through the woods, I suddenly saw this scene before me. There was the torrent, and the woods just as I have painted them, and there sat my Naiad on one of the boulders, just as she sits there, singing to herself. I could not believe my eyes at first. I stood and gazed, enchanted. She ~~was~~ not aware of my presence. It was as if I had been transported into another world. Then a bough on which I stepped broke, and she saw me."

"And she vanished, I suppose."

"No, I had met her before, and she recognized me, and was not shy. And we sat down and talked, and the end of it was that she agreed to come and sit as my model."

"No, that does not look as if she was very shy."

"No, she is not shy. I understand your

innuendo, but you are wrong. She is anything but a coquette. She is a simple child — a wild flower that has grown up in the woods. She is neither shy nor conscious. She has none of the arts that we know so well in the city. She assented to my proposition that she should sit to me there as my model, just as simply as she would have gone to fill me a cup of water to drink had I asked her. Besides, I made it all right with the old people, her grandmother and grandfather, not by paying them anything, you know — that it would have been an offence to offer. Everything has been done with their knowledge and consent. No idea of impropriety ever entered into their heads, any more than it did into mine.”

“Naive people, indeed,” said Carlo.

“Well, there was no impropriety.”

“No, really?”

“No, not a shadow.”

“You won’t tell me that that pretty rustic came to sit to you day after day for weeks — for you must have been weeks at your work — and that you never made love to her?”

“No; never.”

“Do you mean seriously to say to me that

you never considered her in any other light than as a mere model?"

"No, to be honest, I can't say that. She charmed me. I became fond of her. I liked to hear her voice. I" — here Marco paused, and looked down on the ground and hesitated.

"I see; you fell in love with her. Of course you did. I saw that in your letter. I see it now still more in your picture."

"T^oown the honest truth, I confess it was something like that. Yes, I could not help it."

"And she — she fell in love with you, I suppose — she could not help it either."

"I will not say that."

"But you know it is a fact."

"I am afraid it is."

"And you told each other that you loved, and all these delightful days were merely devoted to love-making?"

"No. I never told her I loved her, and she never told me she loved me."

"What! do you mean to say that day after day you and she sat there together, and walked together, and you never told her you loved her, and never took any liberties of a lover with her?"

"No! I never even kissed her but once. She was so confiding, so simple, so pure, that I took an oath to myself that until I had made up my mind to marry her, I never would avow my love, and never would take advantage of her or lead her astray."

"Till you had made up your mind to marry her! Do you mean seriously to tell me that you ever entertained such a thought? I could not suppose you would be guilty of such folly as that even in thought; of course, in fact it is impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Why impossible? You know as well as I. I am willing to grant all you say — that she is beautiful, pure, simple, naive — all that you will. But, after all, she is a mere rustic, without education, without knowledge of the usages of the world, without the veneer (well, call it veneer, if you please) of civilization. She looks charming here, I doubt not, in the woods — all her graces have their fitting framework; but carry her to Rome as your wife — carry her into the *salon* and ball-room, introduce her to your highly civilized and cultivated friends and artificial acquaintances of the world, as we call it —

and how would she look there? This wild creature would be wholly out of her element; she would be confused and *gauche*, and offend against all the usages of society. She would be wanting in all tact, in all understanding of the world into which you introduced her, and the scales would fall from your eyes; and she would be unhappy and you would be annoyed, bored to the utmost, and be aware of the sad mistake you had made. And then would come reproaches and scoldings, and lesson-giving and training to fit her for her new life; and then, perhaps, she would rebel, or perhaps she would suffer and be silent, and daily life would be a weight upon you both to kill your happiness. You would be ashamed of her; not because she had not all the high virtues possible, but because she would trip over all the petty *convenances* of society, and be laughed at. Oh, the world is very hard! and it would make fun of you and her, and gossip and chatter and buzz about you like flies, and in vain you would try to drive them off."

"You draw a hard picture."

"I draw a true one."

"No; I think not."

"I do not mean to say there would be any

justice in all this criticism. No; the world is not just: it is carping and cruel; but there it is. We have to take it for what it is."

"But she would soon learn all that the usages of society require. Of course, she at first might make blunders and get laughed at; but she could easily be taught and trained."

"It is unpleasant to teach and train one whom we love, and particularly one's wife. It leads to constant fault-finding, and fault-finding ruins one's peace of mind and discourages love, and irritates even the best temper. And then, again, the question of birth in this girl is a serious one. Blood always speaks out. She is a rustic, but little above a peasant, and do what you will she will always have traces of that."

"No! there you are wrong. She is not a rustic. She is a born lady. When you see her you will feel it in her every word and motion and thought. On one side, her mother's, she is of no high birth — though *she* was an exceptional person, too — but on her father's side she comes of high noble lineage."

"Pho! Nonsense! How can this be? Who was her father?"

"I cannot tell you ; all that I know is that he was a nobleman, a person of education and culture, with whom her mother eloped, and who afterwards abandoned her."

Then Marco told the story of Tonietta.

"That is a sad story enough," said Carlo. "A pitiable one ; but I do not see how it mends matters as to this girl. As far as I understand it, she is illegitimate ; and though this is not her fault, the world will visit it on her as if it was. It visits the sins of the fathers and mothers on the innocent children, and thinks it is obeying Scripture. Ah, no ! believe me, my friend, this will never, never do."

"I have heard you," said Marco ; "but you have not convinced me. I have said all this to myself over and over again ; but after all I feel that I love. Nothing will counter-balance that in my heart. I care little for what the world thinks and says. I do not marry to satisfy the world, but myself. All your reasonings are good — are unanswerable — provided my object in marrying is to please what is called society. But what do I care what society may say or do, provided I am happy in my choice ? Its approval would not make me happy without love.

Its condemnation would not make me wretched with love. Life is not on the outside ; it is in the inside. It is what we feel and what we are that shapes the world to us, and gladdens us with sunshine or shadows us with gloom."

" Ah, yes. You talk as a man in love always talks. *Amor brevis furor est.* Love is a brief madness. It is difficult to reason with a man in love."

" Real love is a permanent insanity — not a short madness."

" I know. All lovers think their love will last forever. They will madly throw away anything, everything, while the fit is on them ; and then when it is too late mourn over their folly. But tell me one thing, Marco ; you say you have never uttered your love to this girl — that she does not know you love her."

" Ah, that is one of my great difficulties. I have never told her I loved her ; but of course she knows it. How could she help knowing it ? It needed no words. When one loves, it speaks out in every tone and act. But if that were all, it would be easier for me. What I fear — why should I say fear ? — what I know is, that she loves me ; and if

this be so, as I know it is, what can I do? If I leave her, I shall make her wretched. Poor Fiammetta! And if I marry her, I shall not only make her equally unhappy in the end, but myself too, as you say. I can sacrifice myself easily. I should get over it, for I should have other and absorbing interests and occupations to engage my thoughts and occupy my time. But this is not the case with her. She must remain here — alone — without occupation or interest; living on the past — hopeless — and aggrieved. I know, I know, I ought to have thought of this before; but I was tempted, and I yielded.”

“I think,” answered Carlo, “you very much exaggerate all this. I dare say she has taken a fancy to you. She sees nobody of your rank and position, and she is flattered by that, and I dare say she compares others with you, greatly to your advantage. I dare say, too, she will be sorry that all this little idyl has come to an end, and will think much about you; build all sorts of castles in the air, perhaps will mope about a little after you are gone. But this will all pass. This is but a little episode, — a little green halting-place on a long march,

where the waters tasted sweet, and the shadow was grateful. But one cannot stay, and one does not stay, in such halting-places ; one goes on, and only a pleasant memory is left. I don't think you need trouble yourself about that. It would be an act of simple madness to marry her, and you must promise me you will not even think of it ; at all events, you must not take any rash step now. There is always time. This at least you must promise. Go away, leave this place ; we will go together anywhere you like. Return to Rome, occupy yourself with your art ; think over the question coolly, and let time and circumstance have their chance. If you remain of the same mind next summer, after you have thought it all over, come back here ; see her again ; see if she seems to you the same ; and if she does, I will oppose you no longer."

Marco sat silent for a long time, and then said, " Perhaps you are right after all ; it will do no harm to give myself time. If she has faith in me, and I in her, we can live the winter out easily ; at all events, easy or not, we can live it out. Yes ; I think I can promise to leave all as it is at present."

After all, perhaps, Marco overstated more

than he was aware all his feelings in this conversation, leaning towards what he feared for her rather than what he felt in himself. He was undoubtedly under a strong impression, and submitted to its charm. That he was deeply in love with Fiammetta was scarcely true; rather, that he had a warm sympathetic feeling towards her — a sense of attraction to her beauty, a tender pity for her lot — which he represented to be love. She had irresistibly drawn him to her by many little threads, which seemed to him stronger and more durable than they perhaps really were. Whether his feeling for her would stand the test of absence and utter change of occupation was the question, and the moment he satisfied himself that he was not sacrificing her ultimate happiness, he was willing to leave the decision of all to the future. We are so much the victims of accidents and circumstances, that we often cannot discriminate truly between what is permanent and what is temporary; and really he was not convinced that he was not under an illusion of the moment. More than this, the question of marriage had never been other than a trouble to him. Unless it was the only thing to do, he thought it should be avoided.

After this conversation, he felt more unwillingness to go to the Casetta ; and as he had a good excuse in the fact that Carlo was with him, he refrained from returning for several days.

Those days were anything but happy to Fiammetta. She watched for him in vain : and as day after day passed and he came not, she began to be greatly troubled in her mind. "It was all Andrea," she said. "He has driven him away. He is offended. I shall see him no more." Then she questioned her grandmother as to what she had exactly said to him — what were the very words she used. Did she let him suppose there was anything between her and Andrea ?

"No," Gigia said ; "she had told nothing of the kind."

"Yes," persisted Fiammetta ; "but you must — think !"

And Gigia thought, and said, "No ; I told him that you were old friends, and that Andrea wanted you to marry him."

"Oh !" interrupted Fiammetta, "you told him that ? Oh, Nonna ! why did you say so ?"

"It was true, Fiammetta ; but I told him

you would not have Andrea, and that was the reason why he was jealous."

"Oh, what have you done? what have you done, Nonna? Then he does not come because he thinks I am to marry Andrea, and he is vexed with me."

"But I told him you would not marry Andrea. But after all, why should you? It was nothing to him who you married. That could not have vexed him."

"Yes," said Fiammetta, sadly, "that is true."

But if it were true, she thought — if he really could look upon her marriage with Andrea as so simple and natural a thing — then, ah, then! he did not love her; and all her hopes were visionary, and all her fancies were follies; and she had only been dreaming, and she was a fool. "But no! but no! that cannot be," she said. "Ah no! I cannot believe that." Yet a doubt, a suspicion, hung over everything; and she waited and waited, hoping that the cloud would pass. Was it possible that he was jealous of Andrea? Ah! that would explain it. But jealous of Andrea, so far beneath him! No; it could not be. That would be too much to believe. So fluctuating between hope and fear these days went by.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I HAVE not seen your Naiad yet," said Carlo one morning. "You must show her to me."

"Come with me then, and we will go up to the Casetta, and you shall see her. I do not know what she will think of me, that I have not been to see her for so many days."

"Let her think what she will. It is all for the best that you should stay away."

So they went up together, lingering along the road. As they approached the house, Marco wished to go on in front and meet Fiammetta, and then bring her down to meet Carlo; but he would not hear of it. "No, no; we will go together," he said; "I want to see just how she will receive you."

"If you wish to see that, let me go on only a few minutes before you. If she sees you with me, it will be quite a different thing."

"So it will; you are right. I will linger behind for a few minutes, where I can see you."

As Marco went forward, Fiammetta caught sight of him, and sprang eagerly to meet him — joy in her face, and lightness in her step.

“Ah, signor,” she cried, “you have come; I am so happy. I thought you might be offended, and would come no more.”

“Offended?” he answered; “why offended?”

“I don’t know; but I was afraid that Nonna might have said something to offend you when she asked you not to come the other day.”

“Oh, no! not at all. I understood it.”

“Ah, signor, are you sure?”

“Sure — very sure.”

“But there is nothing between Andrea and me — nothing I beg you to believe. It was all his doing, and he had no right to behave as he did. I never, never gave him any reason. He had no right to be jealous. He is nothing to me.”

“Has he gone?”

“Yes, signor; he has gone, thank heaven! and I hope it will be long before he returns. I told him to go. I would not have him here. He did nothing but make trouble.”

“Oh! no matter now, Fiammetta; I hope

he will trouble you no more. Don't let us think of him. But you are not looking quite well."

"Oh yes, signor, I am quite well — now that you have come back. I was afraid you would not come again, and that troubled me."

"No, Fiammetta; you won't get rid of me so easily."

"Oh, signor, I did not mean that. But who is that signor coming up here?"

"That? Oh, that is my friend who is staying with me. I brought him up with me to show him the Naiad's Nook, and the Naiad, too, if you will permit me."

Fiammetta's face clouded. He had not come alone. She was not sure what this meant. Here was a third person, who perhaps had come to prevent them from being together — to spy upon them, to do her an injury. True, it was natural that he should come, and that Marco should bring him, but still she wished he had stayed away.

Marco observed this change, and said, "You do not seem to be glad to welcome him."

"Oh yes, signor; he is your friend."

Carlo now came up, and Marco said, "This

is my friend of whom I have spoken so often to you — my dearest friend ; and this, Carlo, is the Signorina Fiammetta, who has done me the honor to be my Naiad."

"Oh, signor," said she, "you must not speak of me like that. I am no signorina ; I am simply Fiammetta. I am happy to see you, signor," she added, turning to Carlo. "Il Signor Conte has often, as he says, spoken to me of you and of your kindness."

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance," said Carlo. "I was, I confess, curious to see you, and see how far Marco had called on his imagination in making the Naiad of his picture. It is very like you — very like indeed."

"I do not know, signor ; I am no judge. I could wish I looked like that ; but Il Signor Conte is a poet, and has seen more with his imagination than with his eyes. He has used a Claude glass," said she, smiling to Marco. "But you will be interested to see the place he has painted. Ah, *that* really is beautiful ; *that* is worth seeing."

"Let us go there at once," said Marco.

"Will you come with us, Fiammetta ?"

"If you like, signor."

They walked along together. The day was

charming, the influences pleasant. "And after all," thought Fiammetta, "he is not so much in the way as I feared — only he keeps staring at me so, that it puts me out of countenance." It was true; he did look at her curiously and earnestly, watching her every movement and expression, and heeding her every word. He was struck — very much struck — by her beauty, by her grace, by her entire simplicity, and began to think that after all Marco was not so wrong as he had supposed. The slight shyness she showed when he addressed her added a charm to her bearing, and drew him towards her sympathetically. Marco said very little. The conversation was carried on mainly between Carlo and Fiammetta. He tried to draw her out, and she soon lost all sense of irksomeness in his presence, and was simple and natural as ever.

At last they came to the torrent. "That is the place that the signor painted, and named the Naiad's Nook," said she. "Is it not beautiful?"

"Beautiful indeed," said Carlo; "a wonderful place! Well, you have had luck, my dear fellow, — charming, exquisite!"

"Is it not?" said Fiammetta sympatheti-

cally. "It was always a favorite place of mine, long before the Signor Conte came here."

"Ay," said Marco, "she was sitting here on that rock when I first saw it. In fact, just as I have painted her in my picture."

"Are not these beech-trees beautiful?" said Fiammetta. "I call them the gentlemen of the woods. They are so smooth and polished in their straight trunks; and their very leaves are so delicate and refined, and have no coarseness about them, and then they have such pleasant movements. The firs there are more serious, solemn, and shaggy, and they are never happy, like the beeches. They only moan and sway, and are ever troubled by something or other, and lift themselves as far from the ground as they can, and talk mysterious secrets up there in the air. And the chestnuts are coarser, though they are friendly and beautiful too; but they are more like rustics, more like us, signor, than the beeches, and they throw about their great jagged arms, and — but" — and here she paused, suddenly overcome with shyness, and said, "I beg your pardon."

"Ah," said Carlo, "I see you are as fond of trees as I am."

"Yes, signor, I am. I have lived with them, and I love them."

"And flowers?"

"Oh, signor, everybody loves flowers. How could we help it? Everything in nature is beautiful, if we know how to see it."

"Yes," said Carlo; "but that is the great difficulty that all true artists feel — how to see nature. But you were saying, Marco, that when you first saw this place, your Naiad was sitting on that boulder. Would she mind sitting there now, only for a moment? Would you be so kind?" turning to Fiammetta.

"Willingly," she cried, "if you wish," and she leaped to the boulder and assumed the attitude in which Marco had painted her.

"She is perfectly charming," whispered Carlo to Marco, as he looked at her.

"Isn't she?"

"I give it up. You have done no more than justice to her. I don't know that you have even done that."

"Thank you," said he at last, after gazing at her for a while. "Don't trouble yourself to sit there any longer."

"It is no trouble, signor. I will sit as long as you wish."

"Before you come down," cried Marco, "Fiammetta, do us the kindness to sing a *stornello*, as you were singing when I first saw you here. Please, do."

"If it will give you any pleasure. Which one? 'Fior d'amaranto'?"

"No! not that. Sing 'Era di Maggio.'"

"'Era di Luglio,' signor, you remember you said it should be."

"Ah yes! 'Era di Luglio.'"

Carlo added his prayer, and then without making any protestations and apologies, she at once began, —

"Era di Luglio e ben me ne ricordo
Quando ci cominciammo a ben volere.
Eran fiorite le rose dell' orto
E le ciliege doventavan neri.
Le doventavan nere nella rama
Allor ti vidi, e fosti la mia dama.
Passo l'estate, e già cade la foglia
Di far teco all' amor non ho più voglia."

When she had finished, Carlo cried "Charming! beautiful! One more, if you please: no matter what — any one."

"'Bella, bellina,' " suggested Marco, "as you sang before."

"Bella, bellina che ti ha fatto gli occhi
Chite l'ha fatto tanto innamorati
Di sotto terra caveresti i morti
Dal letto caveresti gli ammalati
De sotto terra caveresti noi
Mi son levato il cor per darlo a voi."

"What a beautiful voice, and how charmingly you sing!" said Carlo, enthusiastically.

"Oh, signor, I do not sing. I have never been taught. I only sing as the birds sing, without any knowledge."

"Exactly," said Carlo, "and that is what makes your singing so enchanting."

"Oh, signor, you should not flatter me."

"I do not ; I simply say what I think."

"Then I thank you."

An hour or two thus passed, and the shadow was gone from Fiammetta. After all, this friend was, or seemed to be, her friend too, and little by little her suspicions cleared away, if not entirely, at least so far as not to lessen her enjoyment of the present. She thrust from her all thoughts of the future. The present was pleasant. Let me enjoy this, she thought, while it lasts. It was not till the moment of parting came that her fear rose like a spectre before her, and she said to Carlo, —

"I hope, signor, I shall have the pleasure of seeing you here again."

"I hope so, truly," he said, "for I have enjoyed the morning very much ; and when I return to this place I shall certainly desire to renew so pleasant an acquaintance. But

I fear that I shall not be able to do so on this visit ; for I am going away to Rome in a couple of days."

"Going away?" said she, "and so soon?" And then it was that the spectre of fear arose before her.

"Yes ; I must go. And I am going to carry away the Conte with me if I can."

She looked at Marco. She could not speak at first. It was as if a thunderbolt had suddenly fallen out of a clear sky.

"Yes," said Marco, hesitating, "I am afraid I ought to go. In fact I have stayed here much longer than I intended — and — and I — in fact, I find that I must go."

"Oh yes," said Carlo. "His interests require that he should go. I have had difficulty in persuading him to this, for he is too careless of his own affairs ; but really he ought not to stay here any longer, and he knows it."

"Yes ; I am afraid I must go. I should like so much to stay. It has been so charming ; but it would not be right."

It was all clear to Fiammetta now. She understood that Carlo was afraid to leave Marco here, because of her ; and that he was carrying him away to put an end to

everything. But she recovered herself after a moment's pause, and said to Marco,—

“Are we to say good-by, now? Shall I not see you again?”

Carlo made a gesture to Marco, to signify, “Yes; say good-by now,” but he could not. It was too hard, too sudden. He would see her once more, and explain and soften the blow.

“No! oh no! I shall see you again to say good-by. I shall come and see you to-morrow.”

Carlo frowned, and shook his head negatively.

“It is only *a rivederci* at present. To-morrow I will see you again.”

She was not convinced. She doubted whether he really meant to come.

“Do you really mean to come?” she said. “I am afraid you mean to say good-by now. But I wish you would come.”

“I will, I assure you; and now only *a rivederci*.”

So they parted. As soon as they were out of earshot Carlo cried,—

“You were very wrong. You ought to have bade her *addio* then at once. It will only be harder for you and for her to-morrow.”

"I could not; I could not; it is no use to talk to me. I could not, and I will not."

"It is very foolish; that is my opinion."

"Don't reason and argue with me. Think it over with yourself, and you must see that this would have been hard and cruel."

"When a painful operation is to be performed, the sooner it is over the better. What do you mean to say when you see her again?"

"I don't know; but I mean to see her — and to see her alone. I have given you my promise not to take an irretrievable step, and I shall hold to it. That is all I can say."

"You are very weak, Marco. It is all folly."

Then they walked along for a considerable distance without speaking, and Carlo pressed the matter no more. He saw that Marco's mind was made up, and that there was no use of arguing with him. At last Marco said, —

"Well, Carlo, what did you think of her?"

"I thought she was charming. She made a most agreeable impression on me. Certainly she is very handsome, and there

is a singular simplicity as well as dignity in all her bearing that is very attractive. I no longer wonder at you. I think she might bewitch me too in time ; but I should have been wiser than you, perhaps, because I am so much older. I should have fled from the temptation ; I should have feared that I might become as entangled as you are now. I have seen her once. Well ! I don't mean to see her again."

"Is she not all I told you ?"

"All, I dare say. I have only seen her once, but that suffices to induce me to believe that she is all you say. But this does not alter the question. Beautiful, attractive, simple, innocent as she is, you cannot marry her, and I have told you why. It would be an act of madness in my estimation. I will not go over the argument again. You know I am right. You must know it ; and I am afraid, despite your promise, that to-morrow you will break down."

"No ; I will not," said Marco.

"So be it ; I will say nothing more."

But after a few minutes he began again :

"Think of Alfonso. He married a pretty model, you remember ; and what became of it ? It simply ruined him. Oh no ! he did

not care for what the world said and thought. Let it gossip as much as it chose. He would have his own way in defiance of it, and he did. I ask you honestly, do you think he has not repented bitterly of it ever since the honeymoon was passed?"

"You would not compare her with Fiammetta?"

"No; agreed. Fiammetta is a far finer creature; infinitely above her, if you please. But the result would be the same."

"That is begging the whole question."

"No; it is simply stating facts as they are. I know it hurts you to hear such comparisons; but I am a surgeon, who cuts deep to extirpate the cancer, not heeding the pain. Then there was Alfredo, too. He did pretty much the same thing; and what became of that? Well, name to me any one of them that has made such a *mésalliance* that has not suffered for it."

"I know, I know; it is of no use. It would be all very true ordinarily; but this is an exceptional case."

"Every man thinks his own case exceptional. But I will say no more. You asked my opinion. Now you know it, and you must decide for yourself. I don't mean to

make myself disagreeable. I only speak out of the deepest friendship to you."

"I know you do," said Marco; and he took him by the hand.

They said no more on the subject. After they returned to the Villa, they made their arrangements to leave. Marco packed his trunk, and his picture, and all his painting materials; and they passed the evening in talking of other things.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARCO was as good as his word, and after loitering about all the morning, he slowly and on foot began to stray in the late afternoon towards the Casetta. He had, after all, many misgivings as to whether he had been wise in not following Carlo's counsel. It was hard to say good-by so abruptly — hard to her as well as to himself; but would it be easier now when they were alone? He was afraid of himself, and afraid of what he might say. He lingered and lingered along the road, forecasting this interview; and it was not till evening was drawing in that he arrived near the Casetta.

Fiammetta, who had been waiting there for hours, anxiously looking out for him, with many a fear and many a hope, came rapidly forward to meet him, and cried, —

“Oh, you have come, signor! It is so late that I was afraid I should not see you.”

“I promised you I would come, you know; and I never break my promise.”

"Ah! but I know your friend did not wish you to come."

"What makes you think that?"

"I saw it in his face. He is carrying you away against your will."

"Nonsense, Fiammetta! I do not want to go — no, indeed, I do not; but I must go — I must. Indeed, I ought not to have stayed so long; but it has been so pleasant that I could not tear myself away."

"Yes," she answered; "it has been very pleasant."

"But come," he said; "let us go to the Casetta. It is late, and I want to say good-bye to your grandfather and grandmother; and then you will walk with me, as you used to, back to the turning, if you will."

She made no objection, and they went to the Casetta. Gigia and Antonio were both at home, and were surprised to hear that Marco was going so soon.

"Ah! but I suppose it is late for you, signor," said Gigia, "to be here in the mountains. The nights are getting chill, and the winter will come soon; and you will be glad to get back to your friends and to the city, of course."

"I shall be sorry to leave this place; but

I must. So good-by, Gigia, and good-by, Antonio; and I hope you will have a pleasant winter, and be all well."

"May the Madonna bless you, Signor Conte!" both exclaimed, "and bring you all good things." And that was over.

At the door he turned and said, "Fiammetta is going down with me to the turning, if you have no objection."

"*Ma le pace*," said both. "Go, Fiammetta; and, Fiammetta, remember about the" — And she made a gesture of explanation.

"Oh yes, Nonna."

They walked out of sight of the house. Fiammetta did not know what to say. She was very sad and silent, and they walked along scarcely speaking.

It was a lovely autumnal evening. The moon was at its full, just rising over the trees, and the last glory of the sun was fading from the west. At their feet ran the brook, murmuring as it went, and a stillness and hush was over everything. Deep shadows were sleeping in the hollows; the crest of the hills and the tips of the trees were burnished with the silvery mist of the moon, and the moon itself, with a sad, pitying face, was looking down upon them.

They stood together without speaking for some minutes after they had arrived at the turning, and then Marco said, "Well, Fiammetta, I am afraid that we must here say good-by. You have made this a very happy summer to me, but all things come to an end."

"Ah, signor!" she said, and then she began to sob.

"Dear Fiammetta," he said, "why do you cry? Don't cry."

"No, I won't, signor, — I won't. It is foolish in me; but I too have been happy, and now it is all over; and you have been so good to me, and now you carry away all the happiness with you."

"Oh no, Fiammetta; you will be very happy here. I shall always think of you when I am far away, and think how good and sweet you are, and I shall wish the old days back many a time."

"Oh, will you? — will you?" she said, imploringly. "But they will never come back for all our wishing — no, they will never come back."

"Oh yes, they will; they will come back next summer. I, too, shall come back then, and we will renew them together."

"Ah, signor, who knows that the next summer will ever come? All I know is that this is gone, and now comes the winter, and you tell me that you will come back; but it is long before the summer will come again, and before you can return."

"Be hopeful, Fiammetta. You are too young to be sad, and to take such gloomy views. We will both meet again, as I said, and will be even happier than we were or are."

"Ah, than we are! Yes, perhaps; or at least than I am."

Then she put her hand in her bosom, and drew forth from it a little box, and held it out to him. "This is yours, signor. I forgot to give it to you before," she said.

"What is it, Fiammetta?"

"It is the coral necklace you bade me wear while you were painting."

"Dear Fiammetta, that is yours. It is not mine. I never meant you to return it to me. Keep it and wear it for my sake, and in memory of the Naiad's Nook. Stop! let me clasp it myself round your neck; and wear it always."

She smiled through her tears, for there were tears in her eyes; and he clasped it

round her neck. Their faces were close together. She was looking up into his eyes with a look full of tenderness and sorrow. His hands trembled as he finally clasped the necklace. She felt them on her neck, and, as he withdrew them, she suddenly, with an irresistible impulse, flung her arms around his neck, and fell upon his breast, crying, —

“Oh, signor! signor! take me with you! — take me with you! Don’t abandon me. I will serve you well. I will do all you ask. I will be your slave; but take me — take me with you!”

Marco was thoroughly overcome. How could he reject her? How could he put her away, when she thus appealed to him? It was a terrible moment. A great tide of feeling, like a mighty surf-wave, went over him. His whole being swayed to and fro with the impulses of passion and pity. God knows, he himself never knew, how he overcame himself. But somehow or other he did, after he had pressed her to his heart and kissed her passionately, as she looked up through her tears into his face. A great sense of sympathy and protection and sorrow came over him that drove out his fiercer passions, and he took her hand in his and put her gently away, and said, —

"Fiammetta, Fiammetta! you make me very unhappy."

"Oh, signor! I did not mean to do that. But take me with you; don't leave me."

"That is impossible; you know it is impossible, Fiammetta. Don't ask me to do such a thing. Don't ask me to do what is wrong."

"No! I suppose it is impossible. You would not want me; I should only be in your way."

"No, not that — not that! You would never be in my way; but I have no right to take you, however I might wish it. And besides — besides — it is impossible. You know that, don't you, dear Fiammetta?"

"Yes. I see I was wrong. But you will forgive me, signor, — you will forgive me, won't you?"

"There is nothing to forgive, Fiammetta. I am sorry, so sorry, you feel thus. I wish I could say anything to help you. Leave-takings are never pleasant. One always forecasts sorrows, that never come after all. But all will be bright at last. I wish you every happiness. You know I do, — you know I would do anything in my power to make you happy."

"Yes, signor; I know you would. I am very silly; I did not mean to do anything wrong. Say you forgive me, and will not think the worse of me for my folly."

"I shall never think of you but kindly — most kindly. You may always count on me as your steadfast friend, ready always to do anything and everything that I can."

It cost Marco a good deal to say these words. They were so cold — he felt them to be so cold — but it was his only resource. To say what he really felt was impossible. Had he done so, the irretrievable step would be taken, and he had pledged himself not to take it. There would be no going back.

She tried to smile; but it was only a piteous attempt. She knew not what to say. She stood still, and looked down on the ground as in a dream. At last she said, "When are you going?"

"To-morrow morning," he answered; and she mechanically repeated the words.

A loud, long call startled her. "Fiammetta-ah-ah!" it cried. "Fiammetta-ah-ah! Ho-o-o-o!"

"It is my grandfather," she said. "He is calling me: he is coming after me. I must go, — and you must go. He must not find

us here. Good-by! *Addio*, signor!" and she stretched out her hand to him.

"*Addio*, Fiammetta!" he said, as he clasped her hand and held it firmly in his; "*addio!* no, not *addio!* — *a rivederci!* — next summer; and God be with you!" and he turned away.

He was gone — all the world was gone to her. She stood transfixed for a few moments. Then she hurriedly wiped her eyes, smoothed back her hair, and turned to meet her grandfather.

"I am here!" she said. "Nonno, I am coming."

CHAPTER XV.

MARCO found Carlo anxiously waiting for him at the Villa when he arrived there.

"Well?" said he, interrogatively, and looking into the face of his friend.

"It is over," said Marco, in response. "It is done. Ask me no more. It is all over; but I cannot talk about it now."

"Only one word — did you keep your promise to me?"

"Yes."

"That is all I care to know for the present. You have taken a great load off my mind. You stayed so long — no matter, however."

"I will go to my room and make myself ready for supper," said Marco.

There was not much conversation that evening between the two friends, and what there was was trivial. Carlo took a book and read it, or pretended to read it, glancing at intervals at his friend, who sat moodily gazing at the carpet, or pacing up and down the room, engaged in his own thoughts.

"You don't mind if I leave you here?" he said at last. "I am tired — I think I will go to bed."

"Go, go!" said Carlo. "To-morrow at eight, is it not?"

"Yes; the carriage will be here at seven, and we go at eight."

And they separated for the night.

The morning came, cool and bright; a delicious fragrance was in the air. There was not a cloud in the sky, whatever there was in Marco's mind. The carriage punctually arrived; all the luggage was packed in. They both took their seats, shook hands with Pietro and Maria, who wished them all sorts of happiness; Pasquale executed a wild flourish with his whip, that echoed from the house and sounded down the road, and the horse set off at a smart trot. They had scarcely gone a quarter of a mile, when Marco's eye caught sight of a figure half hidden by the trees, and near the road.

"Look!" he said, touching Carlo's arm, "it is Fiammetta."

Yes; it was Fiammetta. She had come down to catch a last look of Marco, and there she had been sitting for hours. She had not intended he should see her; but she wanted

the poor momentary consolation of one last sight of him. As Marco caught sight of her, he called "Fiammetta!" and she came forward. As they pulled up the horse, —

"Ah, Fiammetta," he cried, "you should not have come down here."

"It was to say good-by," she said, "to you, and to the signor."

At their call she came up to the carriage and they all shook hands.

"Good-by, signori," she said.

"No; *a rivederci*," said Marco; "*a rivederci*, Fiammetta. We will have another pleasant summer together next year."

"Who knows?" she said. "May the Madonna have you in her keeping!"

And then the carriage drove on, and Marco kept constantly looking back, and waving his handkerchief to her, till she was lost to sight.

"Poor little thing!" exclaimed Carlo, "I am sorry for her."

Marco looked blankly out into the distance. He could not speak.

For a time, as they drove on, little was said; but at last Marco gave an account of their parting the previous night in full, and Carlo was satisfied.

"Well," he said; "now that chapter of a pretty romance is closed, and you must think of it no longer, — for the present at least."

"That is easy to say," answered Marco. "Good advice it may be, but not easy to follow. However, it is over, at all events, for good or for ill, who can tell which?"

"For good — for good, depend upon it. Let us talk no more about it."

They did not. As they went on, Marco's mood gradually gave way to lighter feelings. The day was delightful. Carlo talked well and steadily on all sorts of subjects, and laid plans for the winter. There was the excitement of coming again into the world of people and noise and bustle; and by the time they arrived in Rome, Marco was himself again. Once there, he began to occupy himself in his studio, in visits to his friends, in hearing their reports and news, seeing the pictures that had been painted, and listening to the gossip of the town, — the scandal, the jokes, the follies, the marriages, the engagements, the politics; in a word, all the swarming interests of the busy world — and the episode of the summer began to look different to him.

His picture proved a great success. It was not only much admired, but he had repeated and most advantageous offers for it. These, however, he refused ; he wished, at least, to make a copy of it to keep for himself in memory of Fiammetta, and until he had done this he would not dispose of it. This was, however, finally arranged ; and it was bought at, for him, a large price, with the understanding that he should keep it and copy it at his leisure.

Other subjects now came in to paint, and art resumed its claim on his time and thoughts. He finished his Judith, and began to make studies for a new picture, and this he soon was busily engaged upon. The weeks and the months went by busily and rapidly, — the winter came on. He frequented constantly the theatre and the opera and the various concerts. He went more into society, — to the little reunions of his friends, to balls and large receptions, and was everywhere welcomed. He made some new friends among the foreigners who frequented Rome, and became interested in a fresh set of ideas and feelings ; and it was only now and then that the image of Fiammetta came up before him ; always, indeed,

pleasantly, but in a more prosaic way than before. He began to think that, after all, Carlo had been right. It would have been a folly. True, she was charming, graceful, naive, innocent, there, with the solitude and surroundings of nature ; but here, in this artificial world, that laughed at romance, she would have been out of place. It had been a dream, a very delightful dream ; but, after all, had it been more than a dream ? No ; on the whole, perhaps not.

It was a long time before he came to this conclusion. Months had passed away since he had left her, and it was now February, when the blood in the year is sluggish, and romance has gone to sleep. Sometimes he and Carlo talked over the matter, and, on the whole, Marco admitted that he had been right. It had been a charming little poem, but life is not a poem, it is only prose ; one cannot feed always on peaches and flowers, however sweet and perfect, any more than one can always play.

The attrition of the world — and especially of the world in a city — is not congenial to romance. Little by little it wears out the flowery and grass-covered road, and reduces it to hard, dry dust and gravel. This

was not entirely the case with Marco. It acted rather on him like a long drought that fades the ever-springing grass and flowers, despoils them of their freshness, and covers them with the dust of the highway. Perhaps a sudden shower, a downfall of profuse rain, might revive and reglorify them ; but still, for the time, they have lost their charm — one feels regret at looking at them, not a desire to gather and wear them.

This, in short, was the history of Marco after he left Fiammetta. With her the story was different. She was alone ; there were no interests of society to engage and occupy her mind. Her life went on in the old monotonous path, over the same road of petty uncongenial duties. The luxuriant peace of summer had passed by ; autumn had gone, with its gleams of pensive and melancholy beauty ; and winter, drear and cold and unfriendly, had come. The sunshine, too, had gone out of her life. After the delicious draughts of joy and love that she had daily drunk in during these glowing days, the draught of common life now tasted bitter. She had no one to talk to who could interest or sympathize with her, no one to whom she could confide all the passionate longing

of her heart, all the ideal dreams of her imagination, all the tenderness of her regrets. Gigia was kind and grandmotherly ; but Gigia did not understand her — could not understand her — and all that Fiammetta felt was a sealed book to her. With Antonio it was even worse. There were none of the girls in the neighborhood who were at all on a level with her, or with whom she could have aught but the most trivial and external intercourse. Her world was not their world ; her nature was not their nature. Their coarse talk jarred on her ; their loves and their wishes and interests were on an entirely different plane. How could she have any sympathy with them ? She longed to pour out her feelings to some one, to share her hopes and her griefs with some one. But where could she find such an one ? Her spirit was slowly dying of starvation — of inanition.

Sometimes, when the days were propitious, she would go back to the torrent, and sit there for hours listening to the gurgle of the waters, and dreaming of the days that were gone. This was a sad pleasure ; and at times she would weep as if in despair. But she could not keep away from the

place. It was so haunted with memories that at moments she almost thought she heard his step coming as he was wont to do. The trees and the brook were alone her confidants; but even they were not the same. The brook had swollen with the autumnal rains to a fierce and brawling torrent, and no longer murmured softly as of old. The beech-trees were riven of their leaves, and only showed their bare branches against the sky. The flowers were dead and gone; all was changed. Could it — would it ever be the same again? Would he ever come back? Ah no! Had he loved her as she loved him, never, never would he have left her. And now, where was he, and what was he doing? He was smiling and talking to others, and he had forgotten her. Not a word had she heard from him, and nobody could tell her anything about him. Ah, yes; the old *stornello* was right that she used to sing to him. And then she would sing it in a sort of despair, —

“ Fior d’amaranto

Mi son sognato non m’amavi punto

Quando mi son svegliato aveva pianto.”

And as she finished she would burst into a passion of tears, and then, remembering

those kisses of his that she still seemed to feel on her lips, she would, in a broken voice, sing the refrain, —

“ Volgite indietro bocchino da baci
Quanto mi piaci pel farce al amor.”

And then again, when the cold winds of the north blew down through the gorge and chilled her, and whirled the dead leaves about, and scattered them over the torrent, she would murmur, “ Ah me !

“ ‘ Quando soffia l’aquilone, s’affosca il mare
Quando spunta l’amore nasce il dolor
Tu mi fai struggere a poer, a poer
Mi fai morire, mi fai morire di dolor.’ ”

Thus many and many a day was spent during the late autumn and the early winter, communing with these melancholy thoughts. This soon began to show its effect upon her health. She grew paler and thinner, and more listless and unwilling to work; and often her grandmother would look at her anxiously, and say, “ How ill you look, child. What is the matter with you? Your eyes look as if you had been crying them out; they are so hollow and dark. What is the matter? You never used to look like this. Has anything happened to you? Are you ill ? ”

"I don't know, Nonna. No; I am not ill, but I am not in good spirits. I suppose it is the weather and the winter."

"You never felt them before. You always used to be so strong and well in all sorts of weather, and now you are beginning to lose all your strength."

"Yes, Nonna; I do not feel very strong, but it is nothing."

"Oh dear me!" at times her grandmother would say. "You remind me so of your mother now. You never used to. She grew pale and thin just as you do, and she always said there was nothing the matter with her. But then she had good reason, poor thing, and you have not. Don't you think you had better let me call in the doctor?"

"Oh no, Nonna; I shall get on well enough. I don't wish to see a doctor. When the weather grows warm again I shall be well. It is the cold, I suppose."

"Yes; and you expose yourself so. You are constantly out in the woods, and they are too cold and damp, and that makes you feel unwell; and you have begun to cough lately. You must really be more prudent."

"I will, Nonna," she said quickly.

Antonio and Gigia sometimes talked over

the matter together, but they did not fathom it. And so gradual was the change from day to day that they were less aware of it than the neighbors, who now and then came in, and exclaimed that she was looking like a rag — a mere rag — and ought to take care of herself. Still it made no permanent impression on the grandfather and grandmother, who said, "Ah, it is the time you know when girls always look pale. She'll get over it."

After this Fiammetta stayed more within doors; but this did not raise her spirits or strengthen her body. It was so monotonous, so dull, that she seemed ever to grow paler and weaker. She craved fresh air and the exercise to which she was accustomed, and she did nothing but think over and over again all the past, in a sort of mute resignation. Hope she had little — fear, nothing — only a sort of benumbed feeling, which prevented her from being interested in anything. When she went out, she almost always went to the old church, and there she kneeled down and said her prayers with a certain kind of hopelessness; but she got also comfort from it. And sometimes she talked with Padre Anselmo, who tried to

cheer her up. But she told him nothing, and he knew not how to help her, though he had the best of will. She also made wreaths to hang upon the picture of the Madonna, and worked at an altar-cloth for the church, in which Padre Anselmo took much interest. But her hands would often fall while she was working, and she could not see the threads for the tears that brimmed up in her eyes.

Gigia once told her that Andrea was coming to his people, and asked if she would not like to see him.

"No, Nonna," she exclaimed. "No ; I cannot see him. I forgive him, now he is away, but do not let him come here. Remember what he did and said when he was here last," and her eyes fired up with a sudden flame, and she became so excited that Gigia said no more. And Andrea did not come.

One day in February she had a sudden irresistible longing to go up to the Naiad's Nook. The day was not a favorable one. There was snow on the ground, and the clouds were heavy and threatening ; still she felt that she must go. The cold would do her good ; the exposure would do her good ;

the worse the wind blew, the better she should like it. She told no one ; but slipped out of the house, and took the old path, and it really at first seemed to put life into her. But the place was no longer the same, and as she sat on the rock it seemed as if she were in a different world from when she sat there some four months previously. The wind howled down the gorge, and wrestled fiercely with the beech-trees, that groaned and tossed their bare boughs. There was a cold chill over everything, as of death. It seemed like the cemetery wherein she had laid all her hopes and joys, and she moaned aloud, as Thekla might have done —

“Mein Herz ist gestorben, die Welt ist leer,
Und weiter giebt sie dem Wünschen nichts mehr.
Du Heilige rufe dein Kind zurück ;
Ich habe genossen das irdische Glück,
Ich habe gelebt und geliebet.”

She had lived and loved, and that was all over.

As she sat there, almost forgetting the time, a fiercer blast than usual assailed the trees, and the rain, cold and piercing, fell in sheets. She rose, wrapped closely round her shawl, covering her head, and hastened home. But she was weak ; the way was not

short; the woods were deluged with water. Her shoes were soaked through, and her dress was saturated, and clung to her skin; and when she arrived at the Casetta she was chilled to the bone, and her teeth chattered with the freezing cold. Nearly exhausted, she pushed open the door, and stood before her grandmother dripping wet, and with a hot flush on her cheeks.

"*Madonna mia!*" cried Gigia, "where have you been, child? What a sight you are! I thought you were in your room. Go up and change your dress, and put on some dry things at once. Come! I will go with you and help you. How could you be so imprudent?"

"I did not expect it would rain, Nonna. It came so suddenly, and I was caught in it."

Scolding and petting her alternately, Gigia went to her room and helped her change her dress, and then brought her down and bade her sit before the fire and warm herself thoroughly, for she was still very cold. But it seemed to be of no use. She could not get warm — a creeping chill seemed to thrill all over her; and Gigia was alarmed and put her to bed, and gave her something warm to drink.

The next morning she was in a high fever, and the doctor was at once sent for; but he unfortunately was away on his rounds, and the message came that he had been called to a poor woman some miles off, who was, it was feared, dying; but perhaps he would return that night, and perhaps the next day, all depended on circumstances, but that he would come up as soon as he returned and see Fiammetta. Misfortunes always come together, and, as it happened, the doctor was detained by the old woman's illness, and by some friends, who prevailed upon him to stay for a couple of days; and hearing nothing more of Fiammetta's illness, he did not come till three days were past. Then he was carried at once into her room. She was in a high fever, and quite out of her mind; sometimes laughing wildly, sometimes weeping and raving of all sorts of persons and things, and crying out for some one, whose name she never mentioned but as signor.

The doctor looked at her carefully, felt her pulse, and made his diagnosis. "How long has she been thus?" he said.

"It is now three days," said Gigia, crying. "Oh! what shall we do for her?"

"Why did you not call me before?"

"We sent for you three days ago, doctor; but you were gone away."

"Very unfortunate," he said; and he looked very grave.

"Will she die?" cried Gigia.

"Oh, I hope not," said he. "We shall pull her through, I hope." Then he gave the most careful directions as to her treatment, and left her, promising to return the next day. "But it is a long pull, you know, Sora Gigia," he said. "It is nearly eight miles, and I am not so young as I was. However, I will come back surely. And mind you do everything I have told you, and be careful."

He kept his promise, and returned day after day, and the fever soon began to abate; and after a week she was sane again, though wretchedly weak and worn, and the only question was if her strength would hold out.

One day she turned to Gigia, and said, "Nonna, I want you to ask Padre Anselmo to come and see me. I should like to see him."

"Of course I will, if you wish; but what can you want to see him for?"

"I should like to see him; I have a fancy to see him," she said.



Padre Anselmo was accordingly sent for, and he came. He was an honest, simple-hearted, good old man, who had made himself beloved by all his parish — tall, spare, with large, dark, kindly eyes, and thin white hair.

“Thank you, Padre, so much, for coming,” said Fiammetta. “I wanted to talk to you alone, please,” — she whispered this to him, — “alone — send everybody out.”

The room was accordingly cleared, and Padre Anselmo took a seat by the bed, and she stretched out her thin wan hand and placed it in his.

“Well, my dear child, what did you wish to say to me? You have committed no mortal sin, I suppose,” he added, with a smile, “of which you wish to make confession and obtain absolution?”

“No, Padre,” she said; “I do not know that I have committed any mortal sin, but I do want to make a confession.”

“Well, my dear, I will listen to it.”

So she told her simple story: how Marco had come and had wished her to be his model for the Naiad; how they had spent long days together talking while he painted his picture; how kind and good and friendly

he was to her; how they had rambled together through the woods, and sat by the streams, and gradually a new world of sensations and feelings had opened before her; and how, almost before she knew it, he had become the only one person on earth she cared for.

"I could not help it, Padre. I loved him — I loved him; and I love him still with all my soul! To me there is no one else in the world. And he is gone, and I never shall see him again, and I don't wish to live any longer. There is nobody I can say this to but you; and oh! I feel that I must say it to somebody. I have done nothing wrong, Padre, believe me — I have done nothing wrong; but I am so unhappy."

"No," said Padre Anselmo. "As you tell your story, you seem to me to have done nothing wrong. If the wrong is anywhere, it is on his side."

"Oh, no! no, no! Do not say that! He never did anything wrong, he could not."

"He stole your heart away — in a careless way — at best. He should have known better. He was not simple and true as you have been, dear child."

"Oh, do not say anything against him!" she implored.

"No, it is of no use now: I will not. And he—did he not love you? did he never tell you so?"

"Never; but I think he does love me—not as I love him, but he pities me; and, after a certain way, he loves me. Yes: I am sure he does."

"Did he never try to lead you astray?"

"Lead me astray? Oh, no! He made me love him, that is all, but that was not his fault. Oh, Padre, I did once throw myself upon his neck, when he was going away, and beg him to carry me with him. I ought not to have done that, I know; but I was afraid I should lose him forever, and I was wretched, and I scarcely knew what I did."

"And what did he say?"

"Ah! he told me it was impossible, and was wrong, and he tried to console me. Oh, he was very good and kind!"

"Ah," said the old Padre, and he shook his head sadly, and then said, "Well, my daughter, there has been no wrong done, as far as I understand, and you must think no more about it; don't be troubled."

"Ah, that is impossible! I lie here and think it all over and over and over—all the words he said, all the happy days. Oh, *Pa-*

dre mio! there is only one thought, one wish in my heart, and that is to see him again. I must — I must see him again before I die!”

“Before you die, my child? Oh, you are not going to die, I hope, for many a long day to come.”

“Oh, yes, I am. I know it—I feel it. I am dying now; and all that I wish is to see him once more—only once. That would make me happy. And I want to ask you to do something for me.”

“What is it, my daughter? If it be possible, I will do it.”

“I want you to write to him, and to tell him that I am dying—do not shake your head, I am, and I know I am—and to say to him that, if he will come and let me see him once more, I shall die happy! I think he will come. I know it is asking a great favor, but I do so long to see him. I cannot die without seeing him. Oh, *Padre mio!* do this for me, and I will bless you forever!”

She had fallen back on her pillow, and gazed at him with her large eyes—now larger and deeper with the ravage of the fever—with so piteous an expression, that

the tears came into the old Padre's eyes, and he laid his hand gently on hers, and said, after a few minutes, —

"I will do it, my child — I will do it. Don't agitate yourself; I will write to him at once, and pray him to come. There can be no harm in that; and do you lie still and strive to sleep, and leave it all to me."

She was still for a few minutes, her eyes closed, her lips moving as if she were praying. Then she opened her eyes, looked at him, and said, —

"I could not say this to Nonna. I am afraid she would not understand, and I have always kept this secret from her. I knew it would make her unhappy. You must not tell her, Padre."

"I will say nothing to her about it," he answered. "Now lie still and try to sleep, and believe that all will come right at last. You must try to be quiet, and grow stronger."

"I will," she said, "now that I may hope to see him. You will write at once, will you not? There is no time to lose."

"I will go and write this very moment."

Padre Anselmo then went away, touched by this sad story. There was no time, as he

knew, to lose, and he wrote to Marco immediately the following letter : —

“To the Most Honorable

The COUNT MARCO STERRONI, Rome.

“SIGNOR CONTE, — I have just come from the bedside of Fiammetta of the Casetta, and it is at her special request that I write to you. She is very ill, and I am afraid there is but little hope that she will recover. She has told me frankly the whole story of her relations to you, and has begged me to ask you, if it be possible, to come and see her. The poor child has so set her heart on this that I pray you, if it be possible, to grant her request. It would be to her a great consolation — perhaps it might save her. Alas! we know so little how to help each other in this life, that possibly your presence might do for her what all our medicines and prayers may fail to effect. Therefore it is that I pray you earnestly to come. She is very weak, very ill ; but she says she cannot die without seeing you. Let us hope that she will yet live ; but at all events come if you can and at once if you wish to see her.

With much esteem, I am, your faithful servant, PADRE ANSELMO, *Curato.*”

CHAPTER XVI.

IT was a chill night in February, and Marco and Carlo were sitting before a good fire, and talking gayly of many matters — art, friends, gossip. The rain beat on the panes with frequent gusts of wind, and the chimney roared as the flames quivered and darted up its blackened throat. They had been dining out together with a friend, and now they were sitting and discussing calmly some of the opinions which had there been expressed. There was a comfort in feeling well housed in a pleasant room, amid books and pictures, while the storm raged without. Perhaps by way of contrast, while they were talking and dropping into occasional silences, or perhaps for some other hidden reason, their thoughts went back to the summer life of Marco, the idyl of the Naiad's Nook and Fiammetta, and they began to talk of her.

“Sometimes,” said Marco, “I have an insatiable longing to see her again, and to

hear her voice. Of course, she was very sweet and gentle; and at times the old attraction draws me back to her just as it did. I sit and look at that picture, and revive the pleasant days we spent in the mountains and by that torrent. It was an enchanting spot. I shall go back next summer; but I suppose it can never be the same to me again. I wonder what she is doing now, dear little Fiammetta?"

As he was saying this, a knock was heard at the door. Marco rose and opened it, and a letter was put in his hand, marked "Urgent" on the envelope.

"Who can this be from?" he said, as he examined the envelope; "I do not recognize the handwriting." Yet as he took it into his hands an unaccountable thrill went over him, of he knew not what — a presentiment of something wrong, and he almost hesitated upon opening it, out of a vague fear.

"Is there any answer required?" he asked.

"No, signor," was the answer; "I was told to leave it. There was no answer," and the bearer went away.

Marco came to the light and opened it. Carlo saw a sudden expression of horror

come over Marco's face, and exclaimed, "What is it?"

"Read," said Marco, throwing the letter down before Carlo. "Good God!" he exclaimed, and paced the room, without another word, in a state of great agitation.

Carlo read the letter, and was shocked. It was from Padre Anselmo. He looked at Marco, and cried, "Poor Fiammetta! You will go, I suppose?"

"Go? Of course — instantly. Good God!"

He could say no more, the shock was too great. His hands trembled, he did not know what he was doing for a few moments. He took up and replaced book after book, article after article, on the table mechanically, while his thoughts ran wild. Then he cried, "There is not a moment to lose. When does the train leave to-night?" He looked at his watch. "It is ten," he said. "The train leaves at eleven, does it not?"

"Yes."

"Look it out, will you?"

"I am sure it does."

"There is not a moment to lose. Come and help me put some things into my valise. I don't know what I am about. Help me, Carlo."

Carlo did so. They hurriedly packed the few necessary things into the valise, and Carlo ran out to call a cab. It seemed an hour to Marco before it arrived. "Poor Fiammetta! Poor Fiammetta!" he cried; and stretched out his arms as if she could hear him. "I am coming! I am coming!" All the old love rushed over him again, all the old days came back, and a pity, a deep and poignant pity, possessed him. "Live, live! Fiammetta! dear little Fiammetta! I am coming! Good heavens! Where is the cab? I shall be too late. No; there it is at last."

He grasped his valise and hurried down to meet it, and the two friends rushed as fast as the horse could gallop to the train. They were just in time to catch it. He leaped in, shook Carlo by the hand, said, "I will let you know as soon as I arrive. Good-by," and he was off.

It was a dreary night. The train rattled and clanged along through the dark. The rain poured, the winds blew, and within Marco's breast there was a storm that made the outward world seem nothing. On and on and on it went, oh! so slow, so slow. It seemed as if it had never gone so slowly, and as if the night had never been so long.

Meantime Fiammetta grew gradually weaker; but still a little light of hope burned in her breast, though it flickered often as a breath of fear blew upon it. "Would he come? would he come?" This was her perpetual thought. There was little hope in the minds of those who surrounded her; and Gigia, after tending her as well as she could, would creep into the corner, or sit over the fire, and hide her face in her hands and weep.

Sometimes Fiammetta saw this, and then she said, "Don't cry, Nonna; it is all for the best."

"Oh, Fiammetta!" she said, "don't say so: you must get well."

"Yes, Nonna," she answered, "if you won't cry;" and then she would ask, "Is Nonno well?"

Once, after lying still for a long time, and apparently sleeping, she said, "Nonna!"

"What, dear?"

"Tell Andrea I forgive him, and I am sorry I treated him so."

"Yes, dear; but don't trouble yourself about Andrea."

"I was very harsh and cruel to him, Nonna. You must ask him to forgive me."

And then she lay again silent, while Gigia sat by the fire. It was sad enough in that room. The flickering fire cast grotesque shadows on the walls, that wavered and hovered on the ceiling, as the flame died down and then shot fitfully up again. The rain beat on the windows, and a long constant lamentation was in the trees. It was two days now since the letter of Padre Anselmo had gone, and it should now have arrived, she thought.

The old clock below ticked and ticked away the seconds, one by one, as they went irrecoverably away forever. At last it buzzed a moment and struck. Fiammetta counted it silently, but unconsciously, for she was half asleep. As it struck the last stroke for ten o'clock, she started up, extended her hands, a gleam of joy went over her face, and she cried in a low voice, "He is coming! he is coming! I see him! he is coming!"

Gigia went to her side, and asked her what she wanted.

"Nothing, now, Nonna. I am so much better now."

For a while she lay still in a happy dream. He was coming. She should see him. That

was all she wanted. Then she could die, but she could not die till then.

Two other long, lingering nights passed. Towards morning of the second night she awoke from a peaceful sleep. Gigia had also fallen asleep, wearied out with watching and anxiety, and the footsteps of Antonio were heard below, as he carefully opened a window to let in the first morning light. He, too, poor man, had been greatly troubled, and came constantly back from his work to see how Fiammetta was, and to try to cheer her; but there was little cheer in his heart to give. He could fix his mind upon nothing but her. Though he felt that he was worse than useless when he came, he still came constantly to look at her.

Perhaps it was his footsteps below that waked Fiammetta, but she did awake, and in a moment cried, with a rapture in her face as if a vision of joy had risen before her, "He is there! I see him! he is coming through the wood! he is coming!" and she strove to lift herself up, looking with large visionary eyes out on the distance.

"Who is coming?" said Gigia.

"He! he! I see him. Oh, so fast he is coming, and he is crying; oh, don't cry,

don't cry, signor! He is not on foot; he is galloping, galloping. I am afraid his horse will stumble, he is urging him so fast. He does not look well. But he is coming. Yes; there he is down by the turning. Yes, I hear you. I will wait. I am so happy."

"What do you see, dear?" said Gigia.
"You are dreaming."

"Don't speak, Nonna, or I can't hear him. Silence! listen! listen! there he is!"

Gigia listened. The sound of a horse's hoofs sounded in the court before the house. The rider leaped from his horse. Gigia heard a few muttered and hurried words. She went to the window, but saw only the horse reeking and panting. In a moment footsteps were heard on the stairs, quickly but lightly ascending. The door opened, and Marco entered.

"Oh, signor!" cried Fiammetta, "I knew I should see you again. Oh, I am so happy!" and she lifted her wan arms towards him, and a radiant smile was on her face.

"Dear Fiammetta!" he cried, as he came to her side, and took her hands, that she held out to him, and bent over her and gazed into her sad, worn face. "Dear Fiammetta! you see I have come. You must now

get well. Promise me you will get well. I am so grieved to see you so ill and weak."

She looked up to him, and a radiant smile illuminated her face, as she softly said, "Oh, I am well now. I am happy — so happy — so happy!"

Then her arms unclasped from his neck, round which she had thrown them, and she sank back on her pillows. He leaned over her, printed a kiss on her forehead, and said, —

"You will get well now, will you not, for my sake?"

But she did not answer. He looked at her anxiously. "She has fainted!" he cried; "some water!"

No; she had not fainted. She had gone, with a beatified smile on her face, where no human voice could reach her to whisper of love. It was all over; the pain, the doubt, the fear, the sweet human joy, and the Summer Idyl.

They laid her away to rest in the village cemetery, where four solemn cypresses cast their creeping shadows over her grave, slowly moving with the passing days from morning till night, like gnomons of the dial

of Time. Here, where she slept at last in peace, Marco erected a marble cenotaph, on which was simply inscribed her name, and the dates of her birth and death, with these few lines underneath —

“Pura Fiammetta spandeva sa noi
Luce divina. Iddio l'accese
Lascio brillarci per poco, e poi
Presto a se la riprese.”

And here in the summer days many an hour he spent, sadly musing and dreaming over the joy that had gone never to return, and burdened with an aching thought that lay like a heavy stone on his conscience.

THE END.



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